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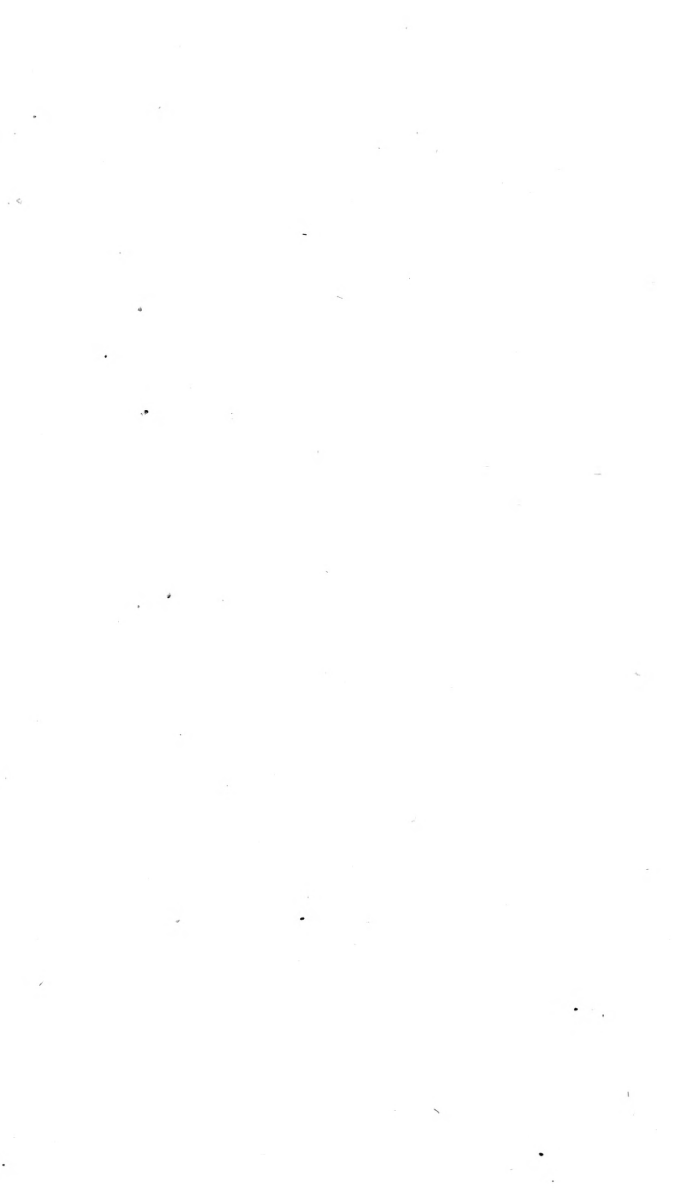


THE HYPOCRITE.



A NOVEL.

Printed by J. Darling, Leadenhall-Street, London.



THE
HYPOCRITE;

OR,
THE MODERN JANUS.

A Novel.

—// // //—
IN FIVE VOLUMES.

—// // //—
BY
SELINA DAVENPORT.

So spake the false dissembler, unperceiv'd.
For neither man nor angel can discern
Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks
Invisible, except to God alone,
By his permissive will, through heaven and earth :
And oft, though wisdom wake, suspicion sleeps
At wisdom's gate, and to simplicity
Resigns her charge, while goodness thinks no ill
Where no ill seems.

MILTON.



VOL. II.

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1814.

THE
HYPOCRITE.

CHAP. I.

DUDLEY had declined taking his accustomed airing with the doctor, as he had letters which he was desirous of finishing in the morning. While he was thus busily engaged, he was surprised by the servants announcing the duke of Fitz-Aubin. Rising hastily, he came forward to meet his grace, who immediately offered him his hand, and expressed his sorrow at finding him an invalid.

“ But,” said the duke, “ I have that to communicate, which, I trust, will do more towards your recovery than the skill of

VOL. II. B your

your physician. You are perfectly aware, Mr. Dudley, that I once suffered myself to believe that I was the happy being destined to become the husband of lord Mortimer's lovely daughter."

Dudley bowed. His pallid countenance, and the interesting languor of his appearance, touched the benevolent heart of the duke, who, smiling on him with the expression of a guardian angel, said—"Your superior merit, Mr. Dudley, rendered all my hopes fallacious. The angelic Althea gave you her love, and rewarded me for the loss of that, by bestowing on me her friendship. When lord Mortimer hurried off his daughter from London, I was ignorant of your marriage, and consequently of the service I might have afforded you. I went with a party of friends on a rambling excursion, and only returned yesterday. It was then I became acquainted with the important secret of my adopted sister, as my mother had forbore to write
to

to me, not being perfectly sure where the letter would find me. I hastened to you this morning, to offer you every assistance in my power, towards recovering your wife, and to assure you (though to a mind like yours it is unnecessary), that the happiness of the countess is dearer to me than existence, and that, to promote it, I voluntarily resigned (ignorant as I then was of her marriage) my just pretensions to the glory of calling her mine. The sacrifice I made is great, and will cost me dear; yet you may safely command my fortune, nay, even my life, if it will ensure the repose of Althea."

Dudley, astonished at the noble magnanimity and godlike generosity of the duke, would have fallen at his feet; but his grace prevented him, and even supported his enfeebled body in his arms.

"I know what your gratitude would give utterance to," said he; "but let us talk of Althea.—How can I serve you?—

how can I restore to her the husband of her choice?"

Dudley, in a voice broken by his agitation, replied—"I will not, my lord, hurt the delicacy of your feelings, by attempting to delineate mine. *You*, who could so nobly resign the object of your affections, are best calculated to appreciate the gratitude, the admiration, yourself has existed. Such conduct makes *me* feel little; and I only regret, that, during my whole life, it will never be in my power to prove what, at present, I have no words to express."

"Yes, Dudley, you possess full power to more than repay what the victory over passion and inclination has cost me. You are the husband of Althea—her happiness, her peace, even her future salvation, may depend on the continuance of your undiminished tenderness. She is young, and still inexperienced in the world; guard her from even the shadow
of

of temptation—watch over her with steady affection—anticipate her wants—study her wishes—and live but for her, and her only; then will you express your gratitude to God and me more forcibly than all that the most florid eloquence could utter. But how do you mean to act? Lord Mortimer, still smarting from wounded pride and disappointed ambition, purposes to keep his daughter a close prisoner at Mortimer Castle.”

“Mortimer Castle!” repeated Dudley, while his whole soul throbbed with unexpected bliss at being thus informed of her residence. “Oh, my Althea! and do I then at last possess the power to follow you!” Overpowered, he fell back on the couch, and with difficulty kept himself from fainting.

“You must get stronger, Dudley,” said the compassionate duke, “before you attempt so long a journey, one which will also be attended with innumerable difficulties, before you can effect

any intercourse with the countess. It will likewise be highly imprudent for you to travel, in your present state of health, without some confidential friend: should you be in want of one, you will confer on *me* the obligation of accepting of my services in that capacity. You have only to fix your own time, and I will be ready with my travelling-chaise to restore you, if possible, to the height of human felicity."

Dudley, again overcome, pressed the hand of the duke, in speechless gratitude, to his lips. Turning aside his head, to conceal the starting tear, he said—"I could wish to set out immediately; but I find that my recent illness, brought on by the sudden removal of the countess, has left me so weak, that I must give myself some hours rest. I have likewise to consult with the worthy doctor Benner, who, during my disorder, never quitted me, and who has a claim to even filial obedience from me. He dines with me to-day;

to-day ; to-morrow, if your grace has no objection, I shall be ready to set off at any hour most convenient to you."

"Your anxiety to begin your journey is indeed very natural," replied the duke, trying to stifle a sigh. "I will call for you about two ; and we will dine and sleep on the road, for it will be the height of imprudence to travel post in your debilitated state. At the last stage, I shall leave my carriage and servants, procure a hired one, and proceed to the little village, which is about half a mile from the domain of lord Mortimer, where my trusty valet shall have got ready for us the best lodgings he can find. Our next step will be to reconnoitre the Castle, and learn, if possible, in what part lay the rooms of the countess. Should they be situated in the south, they will overlook a rapid and dangerous river, which will nevertheless afford us, perhaps, the only means of holding any communication with Althea."

The duke now took leave of Dudley, whose heart beat high, with rapturous expectation of soon beholding his adored Althea. When the doctor arrived, he flew to meet him, and to recount the blissful tidings which the duke had brought him. His friend sincerely rejoiced at the intelligence, which seemed to reanimate his young patient. He bestowed great praise on the noble and glorious conduct of his grace, of whom it was impossible to speak too highly; and he felt happy that Dudley had secured to himself such a friend and companion. All that he feared was, lest he should, from over fatigue and exertion of mind, bring on a relapse.

“Fear not for me, my dear doctor,” said the husband of the countess; “my illness proceeded from my being separated from Althea; the delightful hope of seeing, of conversing with her, of yet carrying her off in safety, will give me strength and spirits to perform any thing; and

and when next we meet, I shall hope to present to you my beautiful little wife. Let me not, however, quit town ignorant of my dear adopted father's interesting narrative, which I am as anxious as ever to have concluded."

After dinner was over, the doctor, therefore, to oblige his favourite, resumed his discourse, which he had only broken off in consideration of the health of Dudley.

"Could any thing," said the benevolent physician, "have afforded me consolation during my absence from Amelia, it would have been the fatherly kindness of my uncle, and the engaging attentions of my cousin Indiana. A fortnight elapsed, and my uneasiness at not hearing from home was considerably augmented by my fears and suspicions. A third week passed, and no answer came either from George or Sophia. My good uncle too well knew the cause of my apparent distress, and the sympathy of his

B 5

nature

nature led him to do all in his power to alleviate it. He, with great delicacy, hinted at my having formed an imprudent attachment ; but this, I assured him, was not the case, and immediately mentioned Amelia Eden as the object which had engaged my affections.

“ My uncle appeared very much surprised at this intelligence. ‘ I have been deceived,’ said he, ‘ Frank, by your father, who wrote me word that he was suffering greatly on your account, as he was apprehensive lest you should injure your future prospects in life by a hasty and imprudent marriage, which would forever deprive you of his affection. How my brother can disapprove of your marrying, at a proper time, Amelia Eden, whose sister is to be the wife of George, I cannot imagine ; but you may be assured, my dear boy, that I will not be a party concerned in what seems to me unjust caprice. By the earnest desire of your father, I have stopped some letters,
3 which

which came within a week of each other, and which I will now restore to you.'

"Among the letters which my uncle delivered to me I hastily looked for the well-known hands of George and Sophia. In my impatience, I tore them open, hoping to receive comfort from their contents. In this I was disappointed; my father, after my departure, had questioned them separately concerning the preference I had shewn for Amelia, and strictly charged either of them, as they valued his favour, not to encourage my folly, as he was pleased to term it. Mrs. Eden had likewise reprimanded her daughter for looking less happy than usual; and assured her that she had other views for her than that of marrying a mere boy, and a second son; that she expected her to appear even more cheerful than she generally was, and to consider herself as honoured by the notice of such a man as my father.

"The second letter of my brother en-

B 6

closed

closed a note from Sophia, in which she told me that her father had forbidden her to write to me; that Amelia still loved me, but was so completely under the guidance of her mother, that she had no will of her own, and therefore would not even venture to send me a line, or even a message. My sister tenderly entreated me to be careful of my health, and not to suffer this disappointment of my dearest hopes to affect me too deeply, as it was plain that Mrs. Eden and my father had determined upon doing all in their power to cross my inclinations. George advised me to give up all thoughts of Amelia; 'for,' said he, 'I am now well convinced that she can never be yours. To deal candidly with you, my dear Frank, I like not my father's pointed attentions to Amelia, nor Mrs. Eden's glaring partiality for him. Some mischief is hatching, I am afraid, which the too yielding disposition of our sweet friend will render effective. Direct your letters

to

to be left at the post-office, for I will not answer otherwise for their safe arrival.'

"Here was indeed a termination to all the dear illusions of my imagination; yet Amelia was still free—still loved me; and I determined to gain my uncle's permission to go down for a week, and try if I could not persuade her to elope, and become mine for ever. This step was, however, rendered unnecessary, by a letter from my father, informing me that his brother was dead; that he had consequently become sir George Bennet, with a clear estate of ten thousand a-year, and five thousand pounds to each of his children, except George, who was to receive, six months after his uncle's death, twenty thousand pounds as a wedding-gift, and the Dorsetshire estate, worth about eight thousand a-year. His plate, jewels, library, and pictures, which were highly valuable, were to be divided equally between me and my youngest brother.

"This kind bequest of the old gentleman

man was at that time rendered valueless, by the conclusion of my father's letter, which prepared me to hear of his again entering the marriage state, as soon as he had cast off his mourning. He did not doubt, he said, of my receiving this intelligence with every sentiment of duty and affection, nor of my readiness to pay a proper respect to the lady he intended to make his wife, since I had already testified a due sense of her merits and accomplishments.

“ This could only mean Amelia Eden. Was *she* then to become my mother-in-law—*she* whom my heart worshipped, and to whom my first vow had been paid? ‘ Oh, never ! never ! ’ I exclaimed, loud enough for my uncle to hear, who was only in the next room, ‘ never can I consent to continue in this world, if Amelia becomes the wife of my father ! ’ My agony was so great, that my worthy uncle and Indiana hastened to afford me all the consolation of their endearing sympathy.

Indiana.

Indiana wept bitterly at my sufferings ; and my uncle used all his eloquence to persuade me of the noble victory I should gain over my passions, in quietly resigning her to my father.

“ I was now permitted to hear openly from my family. All were against this cruel union, and all lamented the loss they should sustain, in the departure of their kind maternal friend, who had signified her intention of quitting my father’s house as soon as his intended marriage was made public, and who had refused every pecuniary remuneration for the years which she had devoted to his children. Sophia warmly censured Amelia, for tamely becoming the victim of her mother’s ambition, who no sooner heard of my father’s accession to the title and estate of his brother, than she openly expressed her intention of giving him the hand of Amelia, on the same day that George married Miss Eden.

“ It required all the exertion of those
religious

religious principles which had been instituted in my mind by the friend of my infancy, to bear up against this severe blow, given by the author of my being. The precepts of my uncle I listened to with statue-like silence ; my heart seemed turning to stone—all Nature, and her infinitude of beauties, I looked on with disgust—society was become hateful to me. One only object called my feelings into action, and, by exciting my gratitude, made me remember I had yet an inducement to live.

“ Indiana, my inestimable cousin, devoted every moment of her time to sooth my deep and settled melancholy. Interesting in her person, fascinating in her manners, and mistress of every elegant accomplishment, Indiana was not a being to be looked on with apathy. She dried my tears—she listened to my sorrows, and I found some alleviation of their poignancy, from the tenderness of her sympathy. Every thing that affection
could

could suggest was resorted to, in order to rouse the energies of my mind; parties were made expressly to draw me from myself; yet as the time drew near which was to bereave me of all I loved best, their united efforts proved unavailing. Unable to answer any of the letters from my family, and unfit for the duties of my profession, my uncle became seriously alarmed, lest my reason should receive a material injury, and wrote to my father, hinting, as delicately as he well could, at the deplorable state to which I was reduced.

“ My father’s reply was short. He reprobated the folly of my having for a moment encouraged any idea of gaining the affection of Amelia Eden, and condemned my attachment as criminal, since it was evident that he himself had selected her as the object whom he should prefer above all other women to be lady Bennet. He desired that I would remain in London, unless I could conquer my
boyish

boyish love-fit, and feel disposed to return to a sense of what was due to the peace and happiness of a father who had secluded himself voluntarily from the world for the good of his children, and who now, when going to receive the reward of his past toils and deprivations, was deeply injured, and in the tenderest point, by one of those for whom he had sacrificed so much.

“This accusation stung me to the soul; it called every generous feeling of my nature into action. I requested my uncle to write to my father, to express my penitence for having caused him a moment’s uneasiness, to implore his pardon for having unintentionally given way to the affection Amelia was so well calculated to inspire, since I was totally ignorant of my father’s regarding her in the light he mentioned. That since my fault had brought with it its own punishment, I trusted that he would restore me to the place I had once held in his love; and
that

that when I had the happiness of visiting again my native home, it would be with the confidence of having rendered myself worthy of his notice and esteem.

“ My father immediately replied to the letter of my uncle, highly commending my conduct. He sent me his pardon, and hoped soon to hear that I had recovered from my indisposition, and was able, *in every respect*, to spend a few days in the bosom of my family, to whom I had become dearer than ever, from my readiness to own, and to redress my youthful imprudence. You, my dear Dudley, who love with enthusiasm, can well conceive the blank despair I was now plunged into. With a heart and mind torn by contending emotions of love and duty, I awaited the intelligence of my father’s nuptials. A letter came from George, the day after the double wedding. Amelia, the beloved of my soul, the object of my first and strongest affections, was now the wife of my *father* !

“ No

“No pledges of reciprocal love blessed this unnatural union. Two years elapsed before I had courage to return to the home of my infancy. Sophia was going to be married to a friend of my brother George, and, at her earnest request, I consented to pass a few days with the bridal party. Amelia was sitting in the drawing-room with my sisters when I arrived. On my entrance, they flew to embrace a brother who had so long been exiled from their society. I cast a look towards the sofa on which Amelia was seated. She had fainted. Inquiring for my father, I hastily quitted the apartment, and sought him in the garden, where he was walking with my brothers.

“He embraced me affectionately, expressing his satisfaction on again seeing me at home. Yet I thought he looked embarrassed. I would have wished him joy of his marriage, but that my tongue refused its office. He asked me if I had seen lady Bennet? and on my replying
in

in the affirmative, his countenance resumed its usual composure. At dinner I was again compelled to appear before Amelia; but I invariably kept my eyes turned from where she sat, and as soon as it was over, made an excuse to visit the Edens. Even the presence of Mrs. Eden was more to be tolerated than Amelia's, as lady Bennet.

“ The next day Sophia was married, and the day after, notwithstanding the pressing entreaties of all but my father and Amelia, I quitted them, and returned to my uncle. Indiana received me with rapturous pleasure; she rejoiced that the interview was over, and hoped that now I would endeavour to forget every thing capable of disturbing my repose. Her unremitting attention to whatever could in any degree afford me amusement, but, above all, her evident tenderness for myself, made me resolve to solicit her hand of my uncle, as soon as my heart had recovered, in some degree,

gree, the shock of its heavy disappointment. Two years elapsed, and Indiana then became my wife. A more amiable, a more affectionate one never existed; and, in the uniform domestic happiness of my home, I soon learned to be contented and grateful for the blessing I enjoyed.

“ About this period, my father died of a fever, brought on by over fatigue, and cold caught at a fox-hunt. His death was so sudden, that my family had scarce time to apprise me of his illness. I set off immediately; but arrived too late to receive his last adieu. I remained a fortnight with my brothers and sisters; but saw not Amelia, who was only present while my father’s will was read. To me, whose peace he had so fatally injured for a time, he left a large sum in ready money. All his children were amply provided for. The Bennet estate went to my eldest brother, while that in Hampshire, which had been the birth-place of most
part

part of his children, he bequeathed to Amelia, with a request that it might be the residence of my sisters until they married; and that Mrs. Eden, who had been some years a widow, would in future live with them, and her daughter, whose youth would otherwise render such a home not sufficiently protected. This estate, however, went from lady Bennet in case of her second marriage; it then reverted to me, with a request of my father, that I would allow my youngest brother, who was destined for the army, an annuity of five hundred a-year.

“ Mrs. Eden willingly complied with the last desire of my father, to the no small vexation of my sisters, who knowing well her ambitious disposition, dreaded lest they should be compelled to sacrifice to rank and power their tenderest inclinations. On my paying Mrs. Eden the compliment of asking her consent to carry my eldest unmarried sister with me to town, she testified her readiness to gratify

gratify my wishes ; and Elizabeth's joy knew no bounds, as the carriage rapidly conveyed her from the guardianship of the proud and aspiring mother of Amelia.

“ My Indiana received us with an increase of pleasure, and Elizabeth shared with me all the exquisite tenderness of her nature. I corresponded constantly with Mrs. Eden ; and, by paying her every respect and attention I could think of, gained her permission for my sister to pass a twelvemonth in London. During this time, she was introduced into the most fashionable society. Her beauty, which was of the most animating kind—her manners and various accomplishments, gained her many admirers. Among them was the present lord Mortimer, and captain Deloraine, a friend and distant relation of his lordship.”

“ Heavens !” cried Dudley, “ and was it then *your* sister whose loss appears to have been ever regretted by the earl, and whose nuptial day was even fixed upon ?”

“ The

“ The same,” replied the amiable physician. “ Lord Mortimer loved my sister most passionately ; but his high birth could not influence the affections of Elizabeth ; she preferred in secret the untitled Deloraine, whose virtues endeared him to her above every other who aspired to her favour. At the expiration of the year, I was compelled reluctantly to restore Elizabeth to the care of Mrs. Eden, not without considerable fears for her happiness.

“ Lord Mortimer shortly followed her into Hampshire. So advantageous a match was not to be rejected, and his lordship was acknowledged as the future husband of Elizabeth. I heard of this arrangement with uneasiness, as I suspected my sister’s regard for captain Deloraine. The day, however, was fixed for her union with lord Mortimer : I was invited, with Indiana, to be present at its celebration ; but my profession required my presence in London, and my wife

would not go unless accompanied by me.

“ With impatience we awaited for letters from Hampshire. One came from Mrs. Eden. The night previous to her marriage, Elizabeth had eloped with captain Deloraine, and had by this step thrown the whole family into the deepest affliction. Lord Mortimer and Mrs. Eden were inconsolable, and the latter bitterly reproached herself with having allowed my sister to visit London without her. The same day brought intelligence from the dear imprudent girl herself. Determined not to be the victim to Mrs. Eden’s ambition, she had eloped with Deloraine, who had secretly followed his noble relation into Hampshire, and she was become his wife, and the happiest of women. They were now on their way to Ireland, to join his regiment. She concluded with hoping that the step she had been compelled to take would not injure her in the opinion of Indiana and myself,

myself, whose affections, next to those of Deloraine, were absolutely necessary to her happiness.

“ My life now glided on in one steady scene of domestic comfort, which was only interrupted by the deaths of our infant family, none of whom could we raise, except one sweet girl, who is married to colonel Westbrook. My profession rapidly increased, and, in discharging its important duties, it has been my lot to perform many little offices of humanity and friendliness, and at the same time to acquire an extensive knowledge of human nature. My worthy uncle lived only five years after the marriage of his daughter, and it has been my chief misfortune to have survived that incomparable woman. It pleased Heaven to deprive me of my Indiana, after passing together ten years of her blameless life; but she is gone to receive the just reward of those connubial virtues, which I am

sorry to say are not common in this world.

“ Thus you see, my dear Dudley, that your old friend was right, in affirming the fatal influence of love on the mind of man. My father had voluntarily secluded himself for the benefit of his children, and at a time of life when the world possessed the most powerful attractions. He had ever been the most indulgent, the most considerate of fathers, until the beauty of Amelia Eden, by fascinating his senses, and enslaving his passions, rendered him selfish and unjust ; and he scrupled not to sacrifice my happiness to the attainment of his own wishes. Amelia remained single, with the consent, I believe, of her mother, who thought the Hampshire estate a comfortable residence for herself in her old age. Although frequently invited to pay a visit to the home of my childhood, yet I have steadily declined it, since I found it impossible for
me

me ever to pay Amelia the respect due to her as the widow of my father. We have therefore remained strangers to each other since the first hour of our separation. She continues to live with her mother, on the estate left her by my father; and some or other of my sisters, who are all married, and have families, are constantly with them."

"But what, my dear sir," said Dudley, "became of the high-spirited Elizabeth, and the husband of her choice?"

"Ah, my dear Edmund," replied the doctor, sighing deeply, "her fate affected us all most severely; but me in particular. She continued with her husband five years in Ireland, during which time we heard constantly from her. She represented, in glowing colours, her felicity as a wife and mother, and blessed the hour in which she had courageously escaped from a more splendid alliance, since the undiminished tenderness of her husband left not a wish ungratified,

save that of sometimes beholding her family. Captain Deloraine had quitted the army, by the advice of his relations, and accepted a civil employment in that country.

“ After an absence, however, of seven years, my sister wrote us word that she was at length able to communicate to us the joyful intelligence of being on the point of embarking in the packet for England with her husband, and the dear pledges of their love, whom she longed to present to me and Indiana. ‘ My girls,’ said she, ‘ are all dark-eyed, plump, and saucy, like myself; but my boy, the idol of my soul, who is only a year and half old, possesses the fine blue eyes, and regularly handsome features of my beloved Deloraine.’

“ Alas! my dear Dudley, I was doomed never to embrace this amiable sister and her blooming family. The packet in which they were coming over from Dublin to Holyhead was lost, and, as far
as

as I could learn, every soul perished, although a rumour once reached me, of a child having been picked up by a boat, which put off to the assistance of the packet. I immediately travelled post into Wales, but could gain no satisfactory information on the subject. Some of the peasantry affirmed, that a fisherman, who lived on the coast, a man of a bold and daring character, and who was the terror of his neighbours, had put to sea amidst the storm, and had been seen to return with a young child, and a sailor, the latter of whom died the next day. The child, however, it was supposed had been carried away by the wife of this man to some of her relations. It was also reported that he had picked up a box, containing valuables, as he had quitted his cottage, and gone with his wife no one could tell where.

“ This report, however, was contradicted by others ; and I returned to town completely dispirited and disappointed,

leaving behind a faithful domestic, lest any of the beloved bodies should be cast ashore. It is now two-and-twenty years since this dreadful accident took place; but I shall feel the effects of it while I continue to exist. I have tired you, my dear Dudley, I see, with my long narrative. Let us now take some refreshment, and then converse on a subject which will soon reanimate your sinking spirits."

"My best friend," replied the agitated Dudley, "let me breath a little—let me repress the vain hopes which the latter part of your narration has excited; should they prove true, how singularly happy will it make me!"

"What do you mean, my dear boy?" hastily inquired the benevolent physician. "Speak, Edmund, your emotion alarms me."

"My father and friend," exclaimed the husband of the countess, "it has been ever a source of real uneasiness that I could not ascertain the authors of my being,

being, or even find out a single person to whom I might claim relationship. All that I could ever learn was this, that when an infant, apparently near two years old, I was found in the shrubbery belonging to the sister of sir Thomas Percy, who resided in Caernarvonshire. Being carried by the housekeeper into her presence, on her being informed of the place in which I had been discovered, that worthy woman generously resolved to adopt the discarded child, should his parents remain unknown. Rewards were offered for this purpose, but ineffectually, and I became the favourite companion of the widowed sister of sir Thomas, who resolved to give me an education suitable to my appearance, and the clothes I was found in. These she carefully locked up, hoping that they might, at a future time, lead to a discovery of who I was. My shirt, which was of fine cambric, had the letters E. D. stamped on it; my adopted mother gave me therefore the name of

a dear deceased friend of hers, and I was consequently called ever after by that of Edmund Dudley, and treated by the domestics as the future heir of their mistress. This, however, was not the case, as Mrs. Belmont's property reverted to another person on her decease.

“ About five years after my reception into her family, a decent-looking woman called, and entreated permission to speak to Mrs. Belmont. She was closetted with my kind friend for near an hour, and, when she quitted her, I can well remember her kissing me, and saying, ‘ Yes, yes, this is the same boy—I shall never forget his eyes, nor his smile.’

“ On the death of Mrs. Belmont, her brother continued to protect me. Under his direction I finished my studies, and cultivated those talents, which prevented my being entirely dependent on his bounty. My solicitude to know something of my parents became painful to me, and I repeatedly pressed him to tell me

me

me the meaning of those words the stranger woman had uttered when I was a boy. This he always evaded, most probably out of kindness to me ; but at last I succeeded, a short time before my illness, in drawing from him all he knew on the subject.

“ As sir Thomas was going into Scotland for several months, I once more pressed him to satisfy my never-dying curiosity. ‘ Dear Dudley,’ said he, ‘ what I shall repeat to you will rather increase than allay your anxiety. My sister, when she bequeathed you to my protection, confided to me the result of her interview with the strange woman, who represented herself as the person who had conveyed the infant boy into her shrubbery, on the evening that you were found by the housekeeper. She described your dress and features ; dwelling in particular on the beauty of your eyes, and the sweetness of your smiles. She said that she was wife of the fisherman,

c 6 who

who lived close to the sea side ; that, on the night of the twenty-third of March, a most violent storm arose, and great fears were expressed for the safety of the Dublin packet, which was seen in the offing. Signals of distress were fired ; but the violence of the tempest deterred all but her husband from putting off to its assistance. On his return, he brought with him a little boy almost lifeless, and a sailor, who died soon after. The child was recovered by her attention, but having a large family of her own, her husband suggested to her that the best way of providing for him would be, by leaving him in one of the gardens belonging to some of the great houses of the place.

‘ The known benevolence of my sister,’ said sir Thomas, ‘ induced the fisherman’s wife to make choice of her shrubbery, as the best spot in which to leave the reanimated orphan. She carefully conveyed you to the retreat where you were found by the housekeeper, which
was

was no difficult thing, as she had only to lift you over a low paling, in order to leave you in my sister's grounds. Her husband also thought it advisable to move from his habitation immediately, lest any of the relations of the orphan's family should inquire too minutely after the box, which it was well known he had picked up. This treasure she acknowledged had enabled them to live very differently to what they had ever been accustomed to. It was a large mahogany dressing-case, marked E. D. and contained money and notes, with which they had taken a little farm, and stocked it with all they wanted. It had likewise several trinkets, out of which she had purposely taken one, unknown to her husband, with an intention of restoring it, if possible, to the deserted child, to whose parents the dying sailor affirmed that the dressing-case belonged.

‘ This kind intention of the woman
she

she was enabled to execute, after a lapse of five years. Her husband, whose ferocious nature remained the same, had been killed in a battle with one of his countrymen. She had since married again, to the reverse of her former husband, and lived very comfortably. It was by the consent of her present husband, who had accompanied her himself, that she now begged my sister's leave to see the child she had acted so kindly by, and likewise to repeat to her all she knew of his family. She then gave my sister a gold locket, set round with brilliants, in which was two locks of hair, with the initials I. F. B."

"Have you got the locket?" inquired the doctor, in an agitated voice.

"I have," replied Dudley, rising, and going into his bed-room with breathless expedition.

No sooner did his friend behold the locket, than he clasped his favourite to
his

his breast, and, in accents of joy, exclaimed—"It is the same I gave my Elizabeth!—it is my hair and that of Indiana!"

Dudley sunk on his knees—he could not speak; but his clasped hands and expressive features evinced the pious gratitude of his heart.

"Almighty Father!" said the worthy doctor, "how can I be sufficiently grateful for this unlooked-for gift in my old age? Oh, my Edmund! not a doubt remains but that you are the idolized boy of my lost Elizabeth! The affection I felt for you, on our first acquaintance, was instinct. Ah! how little did I think, when with fatherly anxiety I watched by your bedside, that it was my nephew, the only surviving child of my dear lamented sister! Henceforward, my adopted son, you must bear the name of Edward Deloraine, for by that you were christened, and by that you must inherit the property which belongs to you."

Dudley embraced his uncle again and
again.

again. He would have sat all night, had not the latter reminded him of the repose which was necessary for his long journey. Unwilling to leave his new-found relation, the doctor had a bed made for himself, on the same couch on which he had rested during his nephew's dangerous illness. Neither of them could sleep, though they forbore to disturb each other; therefore remained silent. Morning came, and they rose early, to enjoy, as much as possible, the luxury of mutual confidence and affection.

“ Could lord Mortimer know that you are the son of his beloved Elizabeth, perhaps,” said the doctor, “ his prejudices might be removed.”

“ I fear not,” replied his nephew, “ for he would likewise remember me as the son of the man who robbed him of her hand; no, my dear uncle, I must contrive to carry off my adored Althea, conduct her to your fostering arms, and then acknowledge who I am.”

Rather

Rather before the appointed hour, the duke of Fitz-Aubin arrived ; he congratulated the husband of the countess upon discovering his relationship to doctor Bennet, and promised that worthy man to take every possible care of his nephew. Again the heart of Deloraine, no longer Dudley, throbbed with blissful hopes of seeing his Althea ; his handsome features were animated with love and gratitude, while the proud consciousness of belonging to parents whom it was an honour to claim, gave a brilliancy and fire to his eyes, which delighted his fond uncle.

After many cautions respecting his health, and many promises, in return, of writing by every post, Deloraine took leave of his affectionate physician, and, with the duke of Fitz-Aubin, set off, in full expectation of releasing his wife from the custody of her father, and the walls of Mortimer Castle.

CHAP. II.

Nothing could exceed the attentive kindness of the duke of Fitz-Aubin during the whole of the journey. He saw and participated in the restless impatience, the trembling anxiety of him we must now call Deloraine, and exerted all his own powers of fascination to allay it. At length they arrived at the last stage, where the travellers halted, to arrange matters with Dupree, the confidential servant of the duke.

It was settled that he should proceed on horseback to the village, which was rather better than half a mile distant from the Castle, procure for his master and Deloraine the best lodgings he could find, and represent them as two brothers who were rambling about for their amusement, and who would pay liberally for whatever convenience and comfort
might

might be afforded them. This done, he was to meet the chaise, and communicate the success of his mission.

“Remember, Dupree,” said the duke, “that I trust to your prudence and good sense to manage this business with your usual ingenuity. Our names are Belville. Begone, and lose not a moment to get ready for us a comfortable abode.”

After taking some refreshment, which the agitation of Deloraine almost rendered him incapable of swallowing, they got into a hired chaise, and, unattended, proceeded to the little village which lay contiguous to the rich and spacious domain of earl Mortimer.

“My dear Deloraine,” said the duke, “I must remind you of the advice of the worthy doctor Bennet. You must endeavour to check, as much as you can, this violent nervous affection. Your divine Althea’s happiness and liberation depend upon your composure. For *her* sake be as tranquil as possible ; we shall
want

want all our coolness and foresight, I assure you, to enable us to open a communication with the countess."

"Deeply as you see me agitated," replied Deloraine, "yet it is a mere bodily weakness; my mind remains as vigorous and as unimpaired as ever. To your grace I am under infinite obligations for having shortened, by your conversation and kindness, a journey I should otherwise have thought endless. Oh, my dear duke! already I begin to feel fresh life, for I inhale the native air of my beloved Althéa. Fain would I attempt, this night, to catch a glimpse of her adored features; but my impatient love shall yield to the sober dictates of prudence, and the counsels of friendship. The delicate situation of my sweet wife demands the utmost caution in discovering that I am so near to her. This month she expects to be confined; any rashness on my part might prove fatal to that angelic creature and the blessed pledge of our affection."

His

His grace pressed the hand of Deloraine. "Althea!" he exclaimed, "and thou, sweet innocent! yet unborn, I here swear to devote my life, if necessary, to preserve to thee a husband and a father!"

"My noble friend," cried Deloraine, "never can we repay such exalted goodness!"

"Oh, say not so!" replied his grace; "for should I succeed in restoring you to the arms of the countess, shall I not establish her happiness? Shall I not see the heavenly smile of grateful friendship irradiate her countenance, while love and hope sparkle in her eyes? Oh! shall I not *then* be repaid? Nay, Althea will not refuse to acknowledge me as the humble instrument of restoring her to all she holds most dear, and *then* shall I not be amply repaid? Dear Deloraine, you must not envy me the grateful transports of Althea."

"Althea," hastily replied the husband of the imprisoned countess, "is alone
capable

capable of inspiring and rewarding such friendship as yours. Our lives shall be devoted to our noble and generous Fitz-Aubin."

At the entrance of the village they were met by Dupree, who gave them the welcome intelligence that he had procured for them comfortable apartments, at a large farm-house, where they would be accommodated with the best the place afforded ; plenty of fish, poultry, and fine fruit. Dupree added, that from the appearance of the farmer's family, and the cleanness and neatness of the house, he thought he had been very fortunate in his search.

The chaise now followed him to the place of its destination, and the duke and his companion alighted at the door of the farm, where they were received by the farmer's wife, and two rosy-cheeked girls, her daughters, who, blushing and curtseying, eagerly assisted Dupree to carry in the baggage, while their mother shewed
her

her new lodgers to their room, and then, at the desire of the duke, hastened down to get ready some of her very best tea.

Deloraine walked towards the window, which overlooked a rich and fertile country ; but what fixed his attention, and quickened the pulsation of his heart, was the grey towers of Mortimer Castle in the distance, towering above the venerable oaks, which formed an avenue to one of its gates. Deloraine threw open the casement, round which was thickly entwined the woodbine and rose, while the air was impregnated by a variety of flowers, which blossomed beneath in the garden of the farm-house.

Dupree now appeared, and received the praise of his master for procuring them so pleasant a retreat. “ But you must do more, my good fellow,” said his grace ; “ you must take advantage of the natural loquacity of women in general, and gain from those below every intelligence

telligence that I am so anxious to be informed of concerning the Castle. Dupree, I know you are worthy of the trust I repose in you. I am certain of your fidelity. It is of importance that I should, without loss of time, be informed of the present state of affairs at the Castle ; and, if possible, of the situation of the chamber which is occupied by the daughter of lord Mortimer. This must be done without exciting suspicion, and will require a great deal of judgment and caution ; but you are fully capable of conducting the affair, difficult as it may seem."

Dupree, highly gratified by the encomium of the master he loved, determined to lose not an instant in gratifying his wishes. He accordingly joined the family of the farmer, and soon ingratiated himself in the good opinion of his wife and daughters. He told them a variety of pleasant tales and lively anecdotes ; described a great many old buildings he
had

had seen ; invented some ghost stories ; and then asked if there were any haunted houses in their neighbourhood ?

“ No ; but I be afeard there soon will be,” said Cicely, the eldest daughter, “ for our dear, dear lady at the Castle be so mortal bad, that she be kept in her own room, and no one has see’d her since she came down.”

“ Poor lady !” replied Dupree ; “ do you know what is the matter with her ? Perhaps she is old, and too infirm to walk out.”

“ Old and infirm ! why, Lord love ye,” cried dame Homely, “ she be young, and beautiful as a summer’s morning. Old ! why, my Susan here, and the countess of Brandon, be nearly the same age, and she be eighteen come next January. No, no, I fear all is not right at the Castle, for we have never seen her blessed face since she went to Lunnun, and she and her good nurse, Mrs. Mason, used to call on me almost every day ; and the countess, God
VOL. II. D bless

bless her ! taught Cicely and Susan to read and write, after madam Morris, her governess, went away ; and she promised to teach them more when she came back ; but, alas ! neither she nor my lord, nor even Mrs. Mason, has called upon us since they came back. God he knows all our hearts, but I don't believe the countess is so bad as they say she bees."

" And why not, my good Mrs. Homely ?" inquired Dupree, with a careless air.

" Why, you must know," said she, " that my son Jem has got a boat, and is always a-fishing, as often as his father can spare him. So Mr. Harris, my lord's head man, told him he would buy of him all the fish he caught ; and Jem now fishes every day, and carries it to the Castle. So, one day, he chanced to light upon my lord—a better gentleman never liv'd, and he used always to speak so kind to any of the children, and to ask how their father and mother did—but now not a word

word did he say to Jem, any more than if he'd never see'd him in all his life; and Jem told me he looked so sad, and so sorrowful, just as he did when our late lady died, the countess's mother. Well, off I goes to the Castle, to speak to madame Sibthorpe, the housekeeper, for I cou'd rest no longer without knowing something about the young countess; but she seemed as ignorant as myself; and all I could learn was, that my dear lady kept her room, and that Mrs. Mason was always with her. She sometimes, and that but very seldom, walks in the garden, when the servants are all out of the way. I don't like the look of it, for my part; and I know what I think, and what all the servants think, but that's to myself."

The good woman now heard her husband's voice, and hastened to meet him, and to tell him of the new lodgers she had got. The farmer and his son Jem made their appearance, and, with all the

D 2

genuine

genuine hospitality of unsophisticated nature, welcomed Dupree to the farm. The manners of this young man were far above the common ; he had lived several years with the duke, and had travelled with him over the best part of Europe. A genteel person, and lively disposition, soon won the hearts of all the honest rustics, and Jem, in particular, testified much satisfaction in the company of the entertaining Dupree.

Cicely now presented them with some home-brewed ale, which Jem instantly offered to Dupree, while dame Homely and Susan began to busy themselves in preparing an excellent supper for the duke and his friend. Dupree was pleased with the open countenance of Jem, and judged that he might, from his favourite amusement, and consequent visits to the Castle, prove of essential service to him. Feigning, therefore, to be fond of the same pursuit, he offered to accompany him in the morning, before his masters
were

were up. To this Jem joyfully assented, and volunteered to lend his boat to the gentlemen above stairs, should they feel inclined to amuse themselves on the river, which he, however, assured Dupree was very rapid, and at times dangerous, particularly on that side which washed the walls of the Castle.

As soon as day began to break, young Homely summoned his new friend, and they proceeded to the spot where the boat was moored. Fortunately for Dupree, Jem proposed to throw his net opposite to the Castle, which contained the imprisoned countess. The grandeur of its appearance, half involved in the thick mist of the morning—its dark grey walls, which seemed to set at defiance the bold waves which dashed against its sides, fixed the attention of Dupree, who, counterfeiting ignorance, inquired the name of its owner, and asked several questions, to draw forth the loquacity of his companion. Jem repeated what his mother

had said the evening before, adding, that he would willingly die to be of service to the countess.

“They all say she is ill,” said he; “and well she may, poor dear lady! shut up in those high rooms. Look, those are her windows, and all she has to see is this turbulent river, and now and then a fisherman’s boat. ’Twixt you and I, this is but a sad prospect for one so young and beautiful.”

“Perhaps,” said Dupree, “the earl has his own reasons for shutting up his daughter in those apartments, where no one could get at her.”

“You have hit it, that’s what you have! Why, man, that’s just what I told Dick, my lord’s postillion. ‘Why, Dick,’ says I, ‘mayhap my lord is afeard of the countess being run away with by some of your fine Lunnun sparks.’—‘Ah, Jem,’ said he, ‘you’re right; but I shou’d lose my place if it was ever to come to my lord’s ear that I said so.’—‘Never fear, Dick,’

Dick,' says I; 'for I love the countess as I love my life; and it grieves me sorely to think that she should never now come to mother's, nor be seen by any body: but,' says I, 'Dick, do you think her ladyship is in love with any one?' Dick looked all about him, then whispered—"

Jem stopped, and gazed earnestly in Dupree's face, "Od dang it!" said he, "there bees a some'at about thee, that I beant afeard to trust thee. You will not blab, will ye?"

"No, no," cried his attentive hearer, "you may trust me, Jem; I am a true woman's friend, and would risk a great deal to serve, but rat me if ever I betray one!"

"That's an honest lad!" said Jem, shaking him by the hand, "and I love thee dearly for saying so. Well then, Dick, looking all about him, said—"Jem, I very well know how you and all your family love the countess, and sure enough she deserves it, for she is the friend to

all that are in distress and trouble, and now, sweet soul, she wants a friend herself.'—'Does she?' says I; 'then may Jem Homely never prosper, if he would not go to the land's end to find her one.'—'Ah,' said Dick, 'I believe there's one in Lunnun that would go to the end of the world only to catch a look of her sweet face. My lord he wanted to marry her to some great man—I forget his name; but Dick said he was a duke; and it seems the countess, poor dear soul, fell desperately in love with a private gentleman, and would have him, whether or no. So my lord he hurries her off, down to the old Castle, where Mr.—— I forget his name, too, could not find her; and the dear countess has been moped to death ever since. Now though I have a great respect for my lord, yet I have a mortal dislike to those who would part two faithful lovers; and I wish I may sink, boat and all, if I would not lend a helping hand at any time to bring Mr.——

Mr.—What-de-call-him and the countess together.”

“ So would I, most willingly,” replied Dupree.

“ Mother knows nothing of what Ise been telling ye,” said Jem, “ nor sisters neither. Women love to chatter, like a parcel of magpies, and can never keep a secret.”

Dupree smiled; and Jem having caught as much fish as he wanted, they returned to the farm, where a comfortable breakfast was ready for them, to which they sat down with excellent appetites, the gentlemen not having yet rang their bell.

The countenance of Dupree betrayed to his master good news as soon as he beheld it; and after hearing all that Jem had repeated, the duke hastened to Deloraine, to make known this intelligence.

“ Courage, my friend,” exclaimed the generous nobleman; “ by the assistance of Jem’s boat, and a ladder of ropes, (which, thanks to my foresight, I have

brought with us), we shall be able to open a communication with the divine Althea, take the fortress by surprise, and carry off the glorious prize in triumph."

Deloraine pressed his hand—"Mine be the task," he continued, "to announce to Althea your arrival; trust to my prudence, my devotion to your wife, my dear Deloraine. At noon, Dupree shall accompany me underneath the Castle walls, where we will remain until the countess, or her nurse, notice our boat. By a letter, which I will write myself, she will be prepared for your appearance, and to herself must be left the management of your interview."

"My dear duke——"

"Say not a word," cried his grace; "think only of Althea."

While the husband and the friend of the countess were thus anxiously planning her deliverance, she was herself a prey to all the torments of suspense, despair, and fear. Her father had perseveringly

ingly refused to see her, or even to listen to any message conveyed by Mrs. Mason. Her letters were returned unopened, with this uniform reply—"When the wisdom and justice of the law has dissolved this imprudent marriage of the countess of Brandon, and she becomes sensible of her fault, and the insult offered to her father, then, and not till then, will I acknowledge her as my daughter, and restore her to her usual place in my heart."

"Oh, my lord," replied Mrs. Mason, "at least extend your gracious pity to the unborn infant—suffer her to retain her child—on my knees I conjure you not to separate the countess from her offspring!"

"Rise, Mason," said the earl, in a voice of terrible sternness; "such a request urged again may provoke me to remove the presumptuous suppliant. No power on earth can shake my fixed resolution. As soon as the fruit of this rash union

sees the light, it must be immediately conveyed into my chamber. Begone—I will explain no further!”

Such was the result of the applications made by Mrs. Mason to lord Mortimer. Vain were all attempts to shake the fidelity of Harris or his daughter, who alone were permitted to attend the countess. Her walks were restrained to those parts of the grounds not frequented by any of the domestics, and even then Harris accompanied them at a respectful distance, lest any of the numerous dependants of the earl, who were devotedly attached to their young mistress, should, by her persuasions, be seduced from their duty. For the same reason her father had allotted her the suit of rooms which overlooked the river. Their dangerous height from the deep water, which, with monotonous sound, continually beat against the wall, rendered, in his opinion, all access to his daughter impossible. Thus imprisoned, he defied the vigilance
of

of her husband, should he even discover her retreat, and rashly attempt her rescue.

The delicate constitution of the countess would have sunk under her confinement, and separation from him she so tenderly loved, had not the unwearied attention and maternal kindness of her nurse supported her, and by affording a succession of fresh hopes of her release, enabled the melancholy countess to bear up against the strong forebodings of her own mind. Her trunks had been sent her by lady Wilmington, and from their contents, she, with the assistance of Mason, soon provided every necessary article for the reception of the little stranger.

With difficulty her faithful nurse repressed the groan of agony, as she saw her beloved mistress thus uselessly employed, as she heard her expatiate on the rapture of suckling her infant, that sweet baby which was destined to be torn from the fond arms of its mother at the moment of its birth. Poor Mason did not dare
to

to rob the countess of this her only hope. She looked forward each day to see the long-expected succour arrive; each day a new disappointment arose, and hope at last became extinct in the bosom of Mason.

When the countess felt no inclination to walk, she in general placed herself in the window-seat of her apartment, amusing herself by working for her dear expected baby, while Mason read out of one of her favourite authors. Her harp had likewise been conveyed to her by her aunt, who, knowing her passion for music, judged that it might sooth and charm away some of the painful hours of her necessary captivity. The countess was attached to this instrument, from a variety of recollections. Her adored Edmund had frequently handed it to her, and hung over her, enraptured at the sound of her voice accompanying its tones.

As the time approached which was to
hail

hail her with the blest name of mother, her spirits began to sink under the fear, the unconquerable dread, that her Edmund was lost to her for ever. What could prevent his seeking her at the well-known Castle of her ancestors? what but his inability from sickness or death? Doting on him to distraction, she could attribute his dreadful absence to no other cause.

“Lay down your book, my dear nurse,” said the countess, one beautiful morning in August, “I cannot listen to you any longer; I feel more restless than usual, and yet I am too unwell to walk. Oh, how I should enjoy a sail on this noble river! See, Mason, how tranquil it is now! how gloriously the bright beams of the meridian sun sparkle on its surface! Where art thou, my Edmund, at this moment? Perhaps thy heavenly eyes are now fixed on its lustre, and thy dear heart palpitating with tender apprehension for thy captive wife! Give me
my

my harp, Mason ; I must not yield to the weakness of my feelings.”

She struck the chords, but not, as usual, with a master's touch ; her trembling fingers half refused to draw forth sounds which had so often enchanted her absent husband. Again she swept the strings, and wiping away the tear of fond remembrance, sung the following lines in a voice of plaintive tenderness :—

“ Ah ! wert thou here, to grace my side
With dear protecting love,
Envy might rage, and spite deride,
And friends in vain reprove.

Oh God !—Ah, how, since thou art gone,
Shall comfort reach my heart—
Thy dwelling and thy fate unknown,
Or where thy steps depart ?”

At the conclusion of the last line, the countess was startled by the sound of a fine manly voice, which sung the following stanza :—

“ Safe

"Safe with me thy charms should rest,
Hither did thy pity send thee;
Pure the love which warms my breast,
From itself it would defend thee!"

The countess caught the arm of her nurse in breathless astonishment—"Who can it be, Mason? Surely I have heard the voice before. Go to the window; I hear the dashing of oars. My heart flutters with unexpected hope."

Mason ran to the open casement, then uttered a scream of joy, and motioned to those below as if she was going to fetch something.

"Speak!" cried the trembling countess, rising with difficulty, and moving towards the window.

Mason supported her mistress; but she could not obey her, for tears of rapture choked her utterance. Hastening forward, the almost fainting countess beheld a boat close under the walls of the
Castle,

Castle, in which stood the generous duke of Fitz Aubin.

“My friend ! my deliverer !” exclaimed the countess, and sunk on the shoulder of her nurse. Soon, however, she revived, and eagerly leaned forward to catch the sounds of his friendly voice.

Scarcely less agitated than herself, the duke held a letter in his hand, which he offered to her view. “Fly,” said the countess, “dear Mason ! and fetch me a roll of ribbon. Oh, noble Fitz-Aubin ! thou art now indeed the friend of Althea !”

The ribbon was let down, to which the duke attached the letter. No words can describe the sensations of the two prisoners on drawing up what they justly conceived was a prelude to their liberation. Trembling almost to fainting, the countess broke open the letter, and read aloud the contents:

“Beloved

“Beloved sister! adored friend!

Fitz-Aubin seizes the first opportunity of assuring you that he has not neglected the interest and happiness of one most dear to her—of one who, until within the last four days, was ignorant of her retreat, and who has suffered most severely in body and mind on that account. Oh, Althea! friend of my soul! I have brought thy adored Edmund with me, to prove the sincerity of my professions. We lodge at Homely Farm, under the name of Belville. Say, can you devise any plan by which my impatient friend may clasp to his heart its dearest treasure? Tell me, Althea, how can Edmund embrace his adored wife? Can we, by any means, get admittance into the Castle? or is the window the only way by which he may have access to your chamber? If so, I have brought with me a strong ladder of ropes, by which the highly-favoured Edmund may ascend, and once more enjoy the height of human happiness.

“I wait

“ I wait your answer with impatience, to communicate it to my friend, who I would not suffer to accompany me, until I had apprized you of his presence.

“ FITZ-AUBIN.”

“ My Edmund so near me !” said his lovely wife ; “ oh, Mason, and shall I indeed once more feel the pressure of his arm, the touch of his lips ?—Lie still, fond heart, thy master’s near, and Edmund’s self shall chide thy throbbings.—Give me a pen and ink, Mason—let me reply to the godlike Fitz-Aubin. Ah, how my fingers tremble ! my tears dim my eyes, and the characters are scarcely legible.” When she had finished it, she gave it to Mason to peruse, who eagerly read the following lines :—

“ My generous friend will excuse the seeming ingratitude of Althea,
if

if she, whose heart and mind is occupied alone by *one object*, can even now write only of her Edmund, while she ought to be expressing her gratitude and admiration of his matchless friend. Yes, dear brother of my adoption, Althea appeals to your own feelings for a translation of hers. Her whole life will hardly be sufficient to pay the immense debt due to your disinterested and noble friendship.

“ Tell my adored Edmund, dear Fitz-Aubin, that my father has never deigned to see, or to speak to me, since my removal; that I and Mason are close prisoners in these rooms; and that only Harris, my father’s old and confidential servant, and his ill-natured daughter, are suffered to attend us. It would be impossible to get admittance by any other way than my window; yet the height, the danger, alarms me. Dear Fitz-Aubin, if my Edmund’s foot should slip! Ah me! I shudder; yet I know his presence of mind never forsakes him; and again, that

that is the only way by which I can speak to him.

“ It is moonlight, and the weather quite calm. I think he may venture to-night to his imprisoned wife ; all is quiet within the Castle after ten o’clock. My friend, my brother, from you Althea expects to receive the husband of her choice, the idol of her soul ! To you was reserved the felicity of reuniting two hearts that live but for each other.”

This was let down by the countess herself. The duke pressed the billet to his lips, then hastily ran over its contents. Taking out his pencil, he replied—“ Fear not, beloved Althea, for the safety of your husband. I have solemnly vowed to live only for your happiness and his. Fitz-Aubin will guard the person of Edmund from even the shadow of harm. At half past ten expect us.”

This he fastened to the ribbon, and
then

then taking up his oars, assisted Dupree to row the boat to land. Deloraine flew to meet him. His grace put into his hand the letter of the countess. Again and again it was imprinted with the kisses of the enraptured husband, who embraced the amiable duke with tears of unspeakable gratitude.

Those who have loved with romantic enthusiasm can well define the feelings of Deloraine and his Althea as the hour drew nigh which was to bring them once more into each other's presence. Dupree had secured Jem's boat, who good-naturedly offered to lend his assistance; but this was, of course, declined by Dupree, who said that his masters were fond of going on the water by moonlight, and knew perfectly well how to manage her.

"Mayhap they may," said Jem, "in quiet water; but our river, do ye see, bees sometimes very rough and turbulent, and then a boat is only like a cockleshell

shell on her. It bees fine to-night, and so I thinks there's no great danger, only keep clear of the Castle walls, for the current is main strong just there."

Dupree thanked him for his advice. As he was quitting the room, Cicely caught his arm, and, with great earnestness, besought him to let Jem go with them, as he knew well the danger of the river—"I am sure," said she, with perfect innocency of manner, "if you should come to any harm, I shall never be happy any more. Do, pray, do ye, let Jem go."

"No, thank you, Cicely," replied Dupree, "my master's knowledge is quite sufficient: we shall come back safe, I assure you."

Poor Cicely hung her head, and looked disconsolate, at this disappointment to her wishes. The person and affable manners of Dupree had won her heart, and she was seriously alarmed lest any thing should happen to him. She saw
him,

him, therefore, attend his master's bell with a heavy heart and a tearful eye, and made an excuse to go to her own room, lest her distress should be observed by any of her family.

At length the appointed hour arrived, and the duke and Deloraine, with Dupree, hastened to Jem's boat. The moon shone with unclouded brightness, and reflected on the windows of the countess's prison. Deloraine trembled violently as the boat drew near the Castle walls.

"My friend," cried the duke, "in a few minutes you will fold in your arms the beloved Althea. Do not let your presence of mind forsake you. That is the window to which you must ascend; it is fearfully high; but Althea's snowy arms will receive you. I will go farther up, and wait your return."

Deloraine pressed his hand—"Generous Fitz-Aubin! amidst the transports

of connubial love, you will not be forgotten !”

Mrs. Mason was at the window. She lowered the ribbon, to which the duke fastened the rope-ladder. The countess appeared ; Deloraine stretched forth his arms. She waved her hand to him and to the duke, while her lovely features expressed the contending emotions of her mind. Mason fixed the ladder—she tried if it was firm, then breathlessly seated herself on the window-seat, to watch the safe ascent of her husband.

The duke assisted him to mount—“Steady, Edmund ! be tranquil ; Althea’s life may be sacrificed, should you slip.” With the anxiety of true friendship, he watched the rapid ascent of Deloraine ; he saw him touch the window—enter—and receive the sweet form of the countess in his arms. “Move on, Dupree,” said the duke, pulling his hat over his eyes ; “row higher up the river, to where we may remain.”

Deloraine,

Deloraine, wild with rapture, could for some time only gaze with passionate fondness on his wife, and press his lips to hers. At length he recovered a little composure to inquire how she had been, and to repeat to her his severe illness, and the discovery he had made of his parents.

“ Oh, my beloved Edmund !” said the countess, “ how miserable I should have been had I known of your illness ! But you did not suffer singly ; for all my grief and distress was the being separated from you. And do I indeed press you again to my heart ? do I once more repose my head on your bosom ? This moment of ecstasy, my Edmund, repays me for all I have suffered.”

“ Dearest and best beloved !” exclaimed her husband, “ all my agonies are now forgotten. Within your arms all is bliss, all rapture ! How, my Althea, can I quit you, now that I have once again found you ! Our noble friend, the god-

like Fitz Aubin, is ready to hazard every thing for our sake. Oh, my Althea ! his virtues, and the sacrifice he has made, must make me seem little in your eyes. Such a man was indeed worthy of my Althea !”

The countess kissed his cheek tenderly—
“ As a sister,” said she, “ I love the duke ; my gratitude to him is unspeakable ; but *you* only, Edmund, could have made me happy—you only have given me a foretaste of celestial happiness. Even now, were I free to chuse, and poverty and you were offered to me, or the summit of power and our matchless friend, I would clasp my Edmund round the neck, and voluntarily endure every deprivation of rank and fortune, to be blest with thy constant presence, thy tenderness, which would make a barren wilderness appear a paradise !”

Deloraine folded her in his arms—“ Althea, ever adored ! my love can never diminish ; my whole life shall be devoted
to

to your peace. But how, my own dear Althea, can we contrive your escape? Say, dearest, is there no hope of your eluding the vigilance of Harris? In your present situation, or at any time, I should tremble at your eloping from the window, but *now* it is impossible."

"I would hazard every thing, my Edmund, to be with *you*; but I feel that it is impossible for me to risk such a dangerous descent. Yet, my beloved husband, now that I have once more seen you—now that I know you are so near to me, and that I can hear from you daily, by means of the boat, I shall be enabled to go through the trial which awaits me with proper fortitude. As soon as I am recovered, I will fasten my baby to my bosom, shut my eyes, and boldly venture to escape by your rope-ladder."

"Sweetest Althea! the Almighty will watch over and protect thy innocence and matchless tenderness. Oh that I

could indeed be near thee in thy hour of suffering, that I could animate thy fainting spirits by my presence, and press to my bosom our already-idolized child ! Yet, my angelic wife, I will try if some of the domestics cannot be corrupted. I would risk every thing but *your* safety, to remove you before your confinement."

Deloraine and the countess had so much to say, that time flew rapidly in their mutual narrations and caresses. The former, however, remembered the generous Fitz-Aubin, and tore himself from the arms of the countess, who tremblingly watched his descent. As soon as he had gained the boat, and secured the ladder, they pushed off for land, while the lovely countess waved her handkerchief, and followed the track of the boat until it was no longer visible; then closing the window, she returned thanks to God for the happiness which had been granted her, and for the safety of her husband ;
then

then retired to bed, more tranquil and resigned to her captivity than she had ever been before.

CHAP. III.

THE next night, at the same hour, Jem's boat conveyed the husband of the countess within sight of the Castle.

“ I cannot bear to leave you, my dear duke, so long on the watch,” said Deloraine. “ Althea would rejoice to assure you personally of her regard ; will you accompany me to her chamber, or do I ask of you *too much* ?”

“ Nothing would be *too much*,” replied his grace, “ that gave pleasure to Althea. Do not, therefore, give a thought upon me, while you are with her. Go, my happy friend, your lovely wife is waiting anxiously your arrival ; yet, if Althea

her domestic comforts, as it separated her for a time from her home and family.

The duke now mentioned the compassionate postillion, and asked the countess if there were any others amongst the servants who might be entrusted with the secret of her marriage?

“ The housekeeper,” she replied, “ might safely be confided in; notwithstanding she has lived all her lifetime in my father’s service, yet her attachment to my mother was so great, as well as to myself, that I may safely rely on her assistance, could she afford me any. I am afraid, however, my dear friend, that all attempts will be useless. My father is anxious to keep my union and present situation secret from all but the Harrises. They sleep at the end of the gallery which leads to my apartments; no person, therefore, could pass unknown to them, and my escape *that way* is consequently impossible. I have half a mind to venture down the ladder.”

“ Not

“Not for worlds!” hastily exclaimed Deloraine and the duke. “No, my beloved friend,” said the latter, “that must not be permitted; the danger at present is infinitely too great.”

“Then I must be contented,” replied the countess, casting on Deloraine a look of melting tenderness, “to remain where I am. Heaven has mercifully allowed me the dear privilege of seeing my beloved husband, my generous friend, and I must not murmur that my removal is delayed.”

She took a hand of each, and pressed them to her lips.

“Dearest Althea,” replied her husband, who, out of delicacy to Fitz-Aubin, repressed his excessive tenderness, “we will, nevertheless, make an attempt, if you will write a few lines to the house-keeper. It may be in her power to infuse into Harris’s beer a sufficient quantity of laudanum, to make him sleep too sound to hear your footsteps. Should

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you succeed in gaining her room, it will not be difficult to convey you from thence in safety to Homely Farm.”

“No, my dear Deloraine,” said his grace; “that will be imprudent. The farmer is, of course, too dependant on the favour of lord Mortimer to be entrusted with a secret of such importance. No one but Jem must know of our plan; he will be of essential use to us. The countess must be conveyed to the next town, from whence we can proceed to a small villa of mine, distant about twenty miles from London.”

“Yet should she be taken ill—should she suffer at all from her removal,” exclaimed Deloraine, “I shall never forgive myself.”

“Dearest Edmund,” said the lovely countess, “I shall think light of whatever I may suffer, if I have but you to support me, and my generous brother to console me.”

Anxious to begin the execution of their plan,

plan, the duke and his friend now quitted their adored countess, and Dupree was soon informed of their hopes. Entering warmly into the cause of the captive beauty, he did not allow himself to rest until he had sounded the mind of Jem, whom he therefore accompanied on his fishing expedition. Jem himself began the conversation.

“ I doos take it very koind of you, maister Dupray, to come with I this morning, ’cause I knows you beed out late last night. Why now, ’twixt you and I, a thought has cummed into Ise head—but mayhap you’d be affronted if I was to tell it ye?”

“ No, my good fellow,” said Dupree, “ I think too well of you to be offended at any thing you might say; because you are an honest and a kind-hearted lad, and would never betray a secret, I know.”

“ Rot me if I wou’d! No, no, Jem Homely is true-hearted to the back-bone; and if so be that I thinks right, why, here’s
my

my hand, maister Dupray ; I loiks ye, and I will go through fire and water to serve ye !”

“ Thank you, thank you, Jem ! and you shall find me grateful for your kindness. But now, Jem, what is it you think ? Come, man, don’t fear to trust me. Is it not something about my masters ?”

“ Why, you bees a conjuror !” cried Jem, with a stare of surprise. “ Now, sure enough, that’s it. Somehow or other, I could not help thinking that you didn’t have my boat all for nothing so late o’ nights ; and who knows but one or t’other of ’em bees the gentleman that is in love wi’ our countess. God bless ’em ! I say ; they bees both of ’em fine young men, and speak as koindly to a poor man as if he was their equal.”

“ You are a sensible fellow, Jem,” said Dupree, “ and I would fain in my heart trust you with a secret of great importance ; but promise me, Jem, that you will

will not trust your mother or sisters, or indeed any one, with what I shall tell you."

"May I never prosper in this world or the next, if I speak a word to any living soul!" said Jem.

"Well then," replied Dupree, "what would you do, Jem, to release the countess from her prison, and restore her to her lawful husband, and the father of her child?"

All this was Greek to Jem, who rested his oars, and opened wide his eyes and his mouth.

"Ah, Jem! you were right; the poor dear countess was no more ill than you or I; she only pines to be with her husband, whom she married, nine months ago, unknown to his lordship, who, as soon as he found out her attachment, carried her away from London, and shut her up in the Castle; and now, poor thing! she expects to be brought to bed very soon; and God knows what will become
of

of the baby, if we cannot get away its mother !”

The tears ran down the brown cheeks of honest Jem Homely. “ Lord ha’ mercy on us !” said he, wiping them off with the sleeve of his shirt, “ who wou’d ha’ thought my lord cou’d ha’ been so cruel as to part man and wife ! Poor dear lady ! Oh that I cou’d be of service to her !”

“ Perhaps you can, Jem ; for my master and his brother no sooner heard where she was, than they hastened down to relieve her, if possible. Your boat, my good Jem, has enabled them to see the countess, and she is much happier than she was.”

Jem cast his eyes towards the high windows of her apartment, and stared more wildly than before—“ Nay, nay, maister Dupray, nobody but the deil himself cou’d get up that wall.”

Dupree smiled—“ A good rope-ladder, Jem, and a brave man, in *such a*
cause,

cause, can do wonders. Why, Jem, would not you run every hazard to get a kiss from the woman you loved, if she had been cruelly taken from you?"

"Wou'd I? ah, that I wou'd! Oh, mercy! how happy they must ha' been when they got together once more!" cried Jem, rubbing his hands. "God bless 'em! and the deil take him who wou'd part a man and his wife!"

"Now, Jem, if we could but contrive to get away the countess, your fortune's made; you should never want money again; and the lovely countess herself would thank you. What say you, my friend? will you do your best to help us?"

"Ah, that I will! that I will! and want no reward for doing as I would be done unto. Only tell me how, and I will go to the world's end to serve her! Sure enough, she is the best and sweetest creature that ever saw the light of the sun!"

Dupree

Dupree now informed Jem of their scheme, and asked him if Dick, the postillion, was to be trusted with a letter to the housekeeper? To this Jem replied, that he would be bound to say Dick would risk his life for the countess any day; and that, if Dupree would get the letter, he would give it to Dick when he carried the fish to the Castle, and wait somewhere near the stables for an answer.

With infinite anxiety the two friends watched the return of honest Jem from his accustomed visit to the Castle. He staid longer than usual, and was chidden by his mother for loitering away his time. Jem said nothing; but contrived to slip a letter into the hand of Dupree, who flew with it to his master. Deloraine opened the letter, which was directed to his wife, and read the respectful overflowings of a heart devoted to her interest. Mrs. Sibthorpe promised to do all in her power to aid the escape
of

of the countess, although, she said, that, had she not been married, and in expectation of soon becoming a mother, her duty to her lord would not have allowed her to assist in any plan that would give him uneasiness. Her present situation was sufficient excuse for her disobeying the orders of her master, and therefore she would willingly do her utmost to reunite the countess to her husband.

“ Now,” cried the too-sanguine Deloraine, “ my dear Fitz-Aubin, every thing seems favourable to our wishes—already I begin to feel assured that we shall succeed! Some laudanum must be conveyed to Mrs. Sibthorpe to-morrow by Jem, and the same night my Althea may recover her freedom.”

“ God grant it!” replied the duke; “ but, my dear Edmund, do not be too certain of success, lest the disappointment should fall the heavier. In the present state of our dear Althea’s health, her removal is, I confess, rather hazardous.”

Again,

Again, at the same hour, the affectionate husband ascended the dangerous ladder, while his friend kept watch below. He found his beloved Althea considerable indisposed, from the surprise and unexpected happiness she had so suddenly received. Tenderly returning his embrace, she soothed away his fears, which were immediately excited by the languor and paleness of her countenance. After she had read the letter of the housekeeper, she said—"Beloved Edmund, do not be disappointed if I should not be able to take advantage of this good creature's readiness to serve me. I confess that I am apprehensive, from my present feelings, that I shall not be well enough to make any exertion towards leaving the Castle to-morrow night."

Deloraine turned pale as death.

"Do not be alarmed, my adored husband," said she, fondly pressing her lips to his. "Thy Althea is in the care of Him whose mercy and goodness she has

so lately experienced. My kind Mason, my more than mother, will be with me; and my father, at a moment like that, will not let me want for every proper assistance. Our dear infant will draw its first breath in the same house as did its mother. I shall soon be well, my Edmund. My husband! my soul's dearest treasure! why these tears? Thy Althea will think only of thee, and of getting well as fast as she can, that she may fly with thee to rapture and domestic happiness."

Deloraine strained her to his bosom. He felt a strange depression, a weight on his heart, that almost deprived him of breath. Seeing that his distress affected the countess, he dashed away the starting tears, and again straining her still closer to his bosom, said—"My Althea! my sweetest love! we must yield to the better judgment of Heaven! I feel this disappointment more heavily, perhaps, from having allowed myself to think your removal

moval certain ; but I must submit to what may, in the end, prove for the best. Had my wishes been granted, you, my angel, might have experienced some injury from the flurry, and from the motion of the carriage. To God I commit my adored Althea! Oh, Mason!" said he, pressing her hand, "to your maternal kindness I consign my all—my wife! my child! Dear as the last is already become to me, yet do not suffer the exquisite tenderness of its idolized mother to injure her own health, by acting the part of a nurse, unless she is able without danger to herself. From you also, my kind friend, I shall expect to hear several times daily, by Jem's boat, of the state of my Althea. For this indulgence still allowed me, I ought to be more grateful, more resigned than I am."

Mason, who felt for them both, and who dreaded the fate of their unborn babe, promised all that he had requested, and more, "For," said she, "should the
countess

countess be confined to-morrow night, and unable to see you, I will take care in time to apprise you of it, by letting down a ribbon from the window of our apartment."

Deloraine, unable to leave his Althea, proposed to remain with her until Jem should cast his nets in the morning. To this she willingly assented, and, by a few lines lowered down to the duke, he informed him of his intention, requesting him to let Dupree accompany Jem, to avoid any suspicion in the family of his remaining out all night.

The indisposition of the countess increased, yet she did her utmost to conceal it from her husband. She tried to appear lively, and talked of a variety of things, to draw off his attention from herself. Speaking of Courteney, she inquired, for the first time, if he had given him her letters?

Deloraine looked with amaze—"What letters, my beloved?" said he.

"One

“ One which I gave to him the night before my quitting London, charging him strictly to give it you as soon as he saw you, and another, which Mason delivered with the same urgent request.”

“ Good Heaven !” exclaimed her husband, “ how singular ! how incomprehensible ! he solemnly assured me that you had not written, not even left a message for me, and persevered in this assertion, although he saw me distracted, and suffering all the tortures of suspense and disappointed love, which he had the power to relieve.”

“ Cruel Courteney !” replied the lovely injured countess, “ barbarous man ! what could be his motive for withholding from you, my dear Edmund, the letters of your wife ?”

“ I know not,” said Deloraine ; “ but this discovery reminds me of the superior penetration of my uncle, and brings also to my recollection many little circumstances, which convince me that I
have

have been deceived in him. Be it so—but he deceives me no more. My Althea, my mind misgives me that it was Courteney who betrayed us to your father.”

“ Oh no, my Edmund; I cannot think there exists so base a heart. You were his *friend*, my Edmund; surely no man that was ever once *your friend* would turn your enemy.”

“ Dearest,” replied her husband, kissing her flushed cheek, “ you are too pure and perfect to judge of the envy and ingratitude of man. Yes, I am now certain that Courteney, for whom I have voluntarily injured my own circumstances, and to whom I confided every secret of my mind and bosom, is the viper that has aimed this deadly blow at my life and peace; but, my adored, I can now defy his malice. In spite of all his treachery, I once more hold thee in my arms; and soon, I trust, my Althea will be able to escape from the custody of her father,

to that of her adoring, her devoted husband."

Mrs. Mason now entreated the countess to lie down.

"No," said she; "I cannot afford to lose a moment of my Edmund's stay—I shall not be able to enjoy his loved society again for some time. I am better, and quite able to sit up."

Her looks, however, betrayed the innocent falsehood, and Deloraine entreated her to lie down, promising to sit by her, and, should she fall into a slumber, awaken her before his departure. To please him, she consented, and he supported her to the next chamber, which opened into the one in which they had been sitting.

Worn out with pain and fatigue, the countess sunk into a short and unsettled sleep, while her husband hung over her in speechless tenderness and grief. The tears which he had so long restrained now flowed afresh, as he gazed on the
exquisitely

exquisitely beautiful form of his wife, as he remembered the painful trial which so soon awaited her, and as the horrible possibility of her sinking under it came across his mind. No personal agony of *body* could have called forth the tears of Edmund Deloraine, yet he now wept like a child over his unconscious Althea. He cast a glance round the room destined to receive the first cry of his infant; its gloomy grandeur, and the richness of its furniture, only added to his woe. "Ah," thought he, "how far better would it have been, for this dear angel and myself, had she now been sleeping in a humbler apartment, and on a less costly bed!" Then kneeling gently by her side, he offered up his prayers to the Almighty for her safety.

"Oh, Father!" he exclaimed, "whose unbounded love and unmeasurable kindness extends to the meanest of thy creatures, restore to me my adored Althea! Spare her, as much as possible, the suffer-

ings of that eventful moment which must give birth to the dear pledge of our mutual tenderness! Bless, oh, bless her with strength and spirits to enable her to recover quickly her health! and then, oh God of mercy! let us be reunited beyond the power of man again to separate us!"

Mason now told him that the boat was advancing, and that the duke and Dupree were with the fisherman. Deloraine stooped to kiss the cheek of his sleeping wife, whom Mason entreated him not to disturb. His kiss, however, awakened her, and she rose, to be certain of his safe descent. Throwing her arms round the neck of him for whom she had suffered so much, she remained a few minutes silent on his bosom.

At length she said—"I feel better, my Edmund, than before I slept, and hope I shall yet be able to see you to-night. Tell our noble friend, that Althea will remember his goodness, not only to herself,

self, but to one whom she adores, while she has power to think, and to be conscious of his worth. Take care of yourself, my Edmund," she continued; "do not suffer this second disappointment of our hopes to prey upon your spirits: when next we meet, we shall be reunited for ever."

Deloraine, with extreme difficulty, took leave of his beautiful wife. Already was one foot on the window; again he descended, and clasped her to his bosom. Mason reminded him that Jem had drawn in his nets, and that the hour was approaching when Harris's daughter would attend, to get ready the apartments of the countess. By an effort of desperate courage, Deloraine once more strained the beloved form of his wife to his breast, then hastily joined the duke, whose countenance evinced considerable emotion, as he returned the salute of the countess.

"My adopted brother! my best friend!" said she, loud enough for him to hear, "I

commit to your affection and friendship all that is most dear to me. Watch over him, dear Fitz-Aubin ! comfort him for my absence ; and the blessing of Heaven and of Althea be upon you !”

The duke laid his hand on his heart, and then embraced the beloved object of her solicitude. Each gazed silently on the walls of the Castle, when her window and her white hand were no longer discernible ; and Jem, every now and then, cleared his voice, and drew his arm across his eyes, but not a word did either of them speak. The duke and Deloraine drew their hats over their faces, and hastened to their chamber, as soon as they reached the shore.

The remainder of the day was passed in trembling anxiety and agonized suspense. The generous duke, to the utmost of his abilities, concealed his own feelings, in pity to those of his afflicted friend. Night came ; they flew to the little bark, which alone could ease their
torments.

torments. Alas! the signal of disappointment was suspended from the window of the countess's chamber. They were returning in despair, when Dupree discovered a letter attached to the ribbon. Pushing forward, Deloraine eagerly seized, and broke it open. A piece of paper fell at the feet of the duke; it was directed to himself. Putting it into his pocket, he assisted Dupree to row to land, when Deloraine gave into his hands the letter of the countess, and then hastily retired to his own room.

His grace was deeply affected by the matchless tenderness of the epistle to his poor friend. It was written, she acknowledged, in great bodily pain; yet what most she seemed to suffer from was, the disappointment her illness would occasion to her husband, whom she implored to bear up with fortitude against this second separation, assuring him that she would be doubly careful of herself, in the hope of soon being able to escape from

her prison. She added, that she had been obliged to inform her father of her illness; that he had ordered her every proper attendance; but still refused to see her, until after her confinement. Every thing that the most exquisite tenderness could suggest, she had written down, to tranquillize the mind of her husband, promising to write to him herself as soon as she was well enough to hold the pen.

The note to the duke was in a less sanguine style. It revived all his affection, which, indeed, had never been subdued; it excited the most agonizing apprehensions for her safety; and rendered him for some moments incapable of seeing her husband. A little recovered, he again perused the following lines, written with an unsteady hand:—

“ Fitz-Aubin, my beloved friend, I have exerted all my firmness in writing to my Edmund. My heart beats languidly; it seems to say that all will soon be over. My father’s persevering cruelty oppresses
me

me severely. Tottering on the verge of the grave, he has refused to see me. Fitz-Aubin, should my forebodings prove true, I have embraced, for the last time, the idol of my soul—should I be destined to atone with my life for the disobedience to the author of my being—should I no more be allowed the felicity of seeing my too-sacredly adored Edmund, *who* will make amends for my loss—*who* will sooth, console, and save him from becoming a second victim—*who* but Fitz-Aubin? Yes, my noble, my generous friend, to your tenderness I consign my husband—love him with the affection you have so gloriously testified for *me*—leave him not, I conjure you, until you can do it with safety!

“Should the dear pledge of our reciprocal love survive, my father cannot, nor will not, deny the rights of its father. Let my child be equally dear to Fitz-Aubin; but oh! guard with a brother’s watchful care my idolized Edmund. Oh

that my fears may be groundless ! that I may live to repay my Edmund's matchless love, and your godlike friendship !

“ Farewell, my friend ! my brother ! remember that the last wish of Althea was, that Fitz-Aubin would never abandon to his despair the husband of her choice, the idol of her doting fondness ! ”

Such an appeal, from such a being as the countess, had its full weight on the mind and heart of the duke—“ Oh, Althea ! ” he exclaimed, “ ever beloved, ever adored ! thy request is granted. Heaven bear me witness, that I will be all and every thing that thy love could wish, should the Almighty call thy angelic spirit from this world of disappointment and sorrow. The happiness of thy soul's dearest treasure shall be my constant study ; his comfort and peace shall be dearer to me than my own ! ”

After he had regained a tolerable degree of composure, the duke sought the distracted husband of the countess, and,

by

by his friendly soothings and affectionate attentions, calmed, in some degree, the tortures of his mind, and encouraged him to hope and to trust in the benevolence of HIM who alone has power to *save* and to call back the fleeting soul, half liberated from its earthly prison.

CHAP. IV.

THE countess had no sooner lost sight of the boat which contained her beloved husband, than she retired with her nurse to her bedchamber; and in order to quiet the fears of this affectionate creature, she consented to try once more to forget her pains, by courting the aid of sleep. She awoke, from a slumber of several hours, feverish and low.

“Mason,” said she, “I think it right to inform my father of my situation. I

could wish very much that he would permit me to see him, and to receive his forgiveness, while I am able to support the interview. Go, Mason, make one more attempt to soften the heart of my dear father; tell him, that it may be my fate to expiate my fault with my life, and that I cannot die happy without seeing him."

Vain, however, was the application of Mrs. Mason. Lord Mortimer, although considerably affected by the message of his daughter, yet would not violate his oath. He had solemnly sworn never to see her until after her confinement, and a vow to him was most sacred. She was therefore unwillingly compelled to return to the countess, to whom her countenance betrayed the ill success of her visit.

"My father will not see me," said her mistress, bursting into tears. "I read my disappointment in your face, Mason. Well, I must endeavour to bear this unkindness

kindness with firmness, for the sake of my adored Edmund and my babe. Oh, my husband!" she continued, drawing from her bosom his miniature, "if thy Althea should have embraced thee for the last time—if I am doomed never more to hear thy tender voice, or press to my heart thy idolized form, how bitter will be thy lot, how blank thy future life! My husband, my ever dear husband! who will supply to thee the place of thy Althea? Oh, never, never will thy faithful heart admit a second love!—living or dead, my empire will remain the same. Mason, why do you weep? Come here, my more than mother. To you my sainted parent entrusted the care of my helpless infancy. Promise me, dear nurse, that if I should be taken from this world, you will not lose sight of my infant. This Castle will no longer require your presence. I bequeath you to my Edmund, and to our child."

Mrs. Mason had not fortitude to reply

to this speech, or to support the idea of losing one so long and so tenderly beloved by her. Her distress affected the countess, who, out of compassion to her nurse, endeavoured to rally her drooping spirits. She sat down to write to her husband and the duke, but was obliged to break off several times, from her increasing indisposition, and the melancholy forebodings of her own mind. When she had, with difficulty, concluded her letter to the duke, she gave them to the care of Mrs. Mason, who slid that to his grace into Deloraine's—"I feel," said she, "that I shall be too ill to see my Edmund to-night—let him at least receive this proof of my remembrance."

Too ill to sit up, she once more retired to her bedroom, attended by poor Mason, whose heart was bursting with her fears for the safety of the countess, and her anxiety with respect to her child, whom lord Mortimer had again commanded her to bring immediately to him,
should

should it be born alive. She tried to console herself with the hope that he intended to give it to the daughter of Harris, who was known to be too faithful to her master not to keep inviolable this important secret.

Lord Mortimer, after receiving the message of the countess, sent for Harris to attend him, who found him walking up and down the apartment with a quick and hurried step—"Harris," said his lordship, in a trembling voice, "you must ride to the next town, where Mrs. Sutton still lives, who attended the late countess. Her fidelity is to be relied on. Give her this bank-note of five hundred pounds; tell her that the child must be reported to be born dead; I will take care myself to provide for it; but it shall never inherit the noble name and fortune of its imprudent mother. In the dusk of the evening you can bring her in through the back door of the garden, and up the private staircase which leads

to

to the gallery of the countess's apartments. Remember, Harris, that should the infant be living, which God forbid, it is to be conveyed instantly into my chamber; if dead, which Heaven grant may be the case, let Sutton dispose of it properly herself."

Harris bowed respectfully. His heart was full of pity for the countess, yet he dared not betray the trust his master reposed in him. Silently he returned to inquire how she was before he set off. The sorrowful looks of Mrs. Mason brought tears into his eyes. This encouraged her to speak more freely to him, and she besought him, if possible, not to engage Mrs. Sutton.

"I have a hundred fears," said she, "for the safety of the dear child. For God's sake, Harris, if any other assistance can be procured, do not employ her! I have heard strange tales respecting that woman. Notwithstanding her skill, and the good opinion the late countess had
of

of her, yet I have heard from high authority that gold has purchased her secrecy and silence in more than one instance. Oh ! if ever my angel mistress was dear to you, invent some means to save the child from being carried to my lord, who will never let her see it any more, I am certain."

"What can I do?" replied Harris. "I know of no one to whom I should venture to entrust a secret of so much consequence to my lord."

A deep groan from the countess alarmed her nurse—"Fly," said she, "Harris, and let us at least save my beloved lady."

Harris, with a heavy heart, proceeded on his way to the next town. In his hurry to procure assistance for the countess, he had taken a high-spirited horse of his master's, which no person but his lordship ever ventured to ride. The animal no sooner felt the spur of his new rider,

rider, than he set off with incredible swiftness, and Harris, unable to keep his seat, was thrown when he was about three miles from the Castle. Fortunately for him, it was within sight of a house which stood on the verge of a heath, over which he had to pass to the next town. The man and his wife who lived in it were newly come, and were strangers to Harris; but the former eagerly ran to catch the flying horse, and the latter assisted him into her cottage, and with great humanity offered to rub his foot, which was sprained, with some warm vinegar—"Though," said she, "stop, friend, a little bit, and I'll run and ax the gentleman above stairs, for he bees a doctor, and will cure you in a minute."

Harris thanked her; but said he should soon be well, and would rather have her vinegar. The good woman instantly warmed some, and applied it to his foot. Her husband now returned with the horse.

horse, whom he fastened up safe; and then entering, inquired after his rider, and how far he had come?

Harris evaded the question—"You have lodgers, I understand," said he; "why, I should not have thought you could have found room for any in this small house."

"Necessity has no law," replied the cottager, "and, in a case like the present, we could do no otherwise than find room. About a fortnight ago a gentleman and his wife stopped here in a chaise and four, and begged, for God's sake, we would let them have a bed, for the lady was taken suddenly ill; so wife and I readily gave up ours and a neat tidy room, and next morning the poor lady was brought to bed of as fine a girl as ever I'd wish to see. Wife nursed her, and she bees so pure and hearty, that they be going to-morrow to travel slowly to their own home."

"Did

“ Did you not say the gentleman was a doctor ?” inquired Harris, eagerly.

“ Yes, and I dare say he bees one of the tip-top ones, for he tended his wife all the time, and she told my Peggy that he had saved many a woman’s life.”

“ Can I speak to him ?” said the overjoyed confidant of lord Mortimer.

“ Aye, sure,” replied the cottager. “ I’ll go and ax him to step down.”

In a moment she returned with a gentleman whose countenance bore evident traces of a benevolent and feeling heart. Harris bowed, and respectfully inquired if he might be permitted to speak to him in private ? The gentleman looked surprised—“ I am an utter stranger in this part of the country,” said he, “ and was only passing through it on my return home, when the unexpected confinement of my wife obliged me to trespass on these good people’s kindness, and to turn them out of their room. To-morrow I
mean

mean to quit this hospitable cottage; but if you really have a desire to make any communication to me, I will conduct you to our little chamber—you will not object to speak before my wife?"

Harris replied in the negative; and the gentleman left him, to inform the lady of her new visitor. Harris was requested to come up, which he did very quickly, notwithstanding his sprained foot.

A lady of the most pleasing appearance, who was suckling an infant, begged him, in a sweet voice, to be seated. Harris looked confused—he hemmed two or three times; yet the urgency of the business did not admit of ceremony.

"You'll pardon me, sir," said he, "but the good woman below informed me that you were a doctor—a midwife, I presume?" The gentleman bowed. "I was going to the next town," he continued, lowering his voice, "to procure one; but if you will do me the honour

to

to accompany me, instead of the person I was in quest of, it may be the means of saving the life of a young and lovely woman, who is in want of such assistance."

"Oh, go then, my dear Walter," cried the lady, "go, I entreat of you."

"If I accompany you," said the gentleman, "it will merely be because you tell me that my aid may perhaps save the life of a fellow-creature, otherwise I should decline it, as it may interfere with my intended journey of the morning, which I am desirous should not be delayed. Nothing but the most urgent business, in short, the death of my father, could have induced me to leave home, or to suffer my wife, in the situation she was in, to accompany me. But who, my good friend, is it that requires my assistance? your daughter, perhaps?"

"No, sir," replied Harris; "it is one far my superior. But, sir, will you promise to go with me?"

"I will."

“ I will.”

“ Will you give me the word of a gentleman (for that is in fact an oath) that you will neither, at this moment nor any future one, seek to find out the place to which I shall convey you ?”

The gentleman and his wife looked at each other in surprise—“ I pledge my word, as a man of honour, that I will not, by any means, direct or indirect, seek to find out the house, or the person that I may attend.”

“ Will you, sir, consent to my putting a bandage over your eyes? and will you be silent on every thing you may see or hear at the house you must be conveyed to ?”

“ I promise most faithfully to perform your wishes.”

“ One thing more, sir, is required of you. Should the infant be still born, that you will carry it away with you privately, and bury it in some place, where it may rest undisturbed ?”

“ I like

“ I like not this business,” said the gentleman ; “ but I have pledged myself, and will not retract.”

“ Then, for God’s sake, sir, come with me directly ; and here is a trifling present for your trouble.” He then presented him with the bank-note for five hundred pounds.

“ You have made a mistake,” said the gentleman, returning it.

“ No, sir, I have not ; take it, I beg of you, and let no curiosity induce you to violate your word.”

The gentleman now gave the note to his wife, whom he tenderly embraced ; and kissing his little babe, that reposed tranquilly on the bosom of its mother, he followed Harris down stairs. A horse belonging to the gentleman’s servant was now saddled. They mounted, and soon lost sight of the heath. Harris now requested of his companion that he would allow him to blindfold his eyes, to which he consented, and then, by a circuitous route,

route, which made it seem much further, they reached the Castle. Harris passed through the grounds, and up the private staircase, as he had been ordered, then into a small antichamber belonging to the suit of rooms. Here he left the gentleman, to inform Mason of his success. Overjoyed, she desired him to shew in his welcome visitor, while she prepared the countess for his appearance.

Harris accordingly conducted him into the sitting-room of his young mistress. Taking the bandage from his eyes, he bade him remember his word, and in the next chamber he would find the lady who wanted his assistance. He then returned to the anteroom, to wait the event.

The stranger, on entering the bed-chamber of the countess, was struck with the splendor of the apartment, and the richness of every thing around him. His mind was immediately made up as to the mystery which occasioned his visit. On a crimson velvet bed, deeply fringed

with gold, lay the lovely wife of Deloraine. A long white lace veil was thrown over her, at her own request, to conceal her features; but the beautiful white hand, which pressed in agony that of her nurse, again convinced him it was no common person that he attended.

Her sobs and groans melted his heart. Kneeling by her side, he, in a voice of friendly sympathy, conjured her to repress her feelings, lest her infant might suffer. As he knelt, he contrived to cut from the curtain a zig-zag piece of the velvet and fringe, hoping that, at some future day, it might help to unravel the present scene. Rising to give some necessary orders, his eyes caught a glimpse of a miniature and chain, which appeared to have fallen from the neck of the sufferer. This temptation he could not resist; but hastily catching up the sparkling ornament, he consigned it to his pocket, from a feeling which was more honourable than that of mere curiosity.

The

The agonies of the countess increased ; yet she bore them with saint-like patience, hoping that the smile of her babe would more than repay all she was suffering. Alas ! hapless mother ! never wert thou destined to behold the idolized pledge of thy Edmund's love—never to nourish at thy bosom thy husband's image, or press thy lips to those of the sweet innocent.

The stranger, whose humanity and tenderness were considerably excited, gave a look of sorrowful meaning to the weeping nurse, as he beheld the dreadful tortures of the angelic countess. In a few minutes they subsided. The infant was still born.

Poor Mason threw over the beloved body a rich mantle, worked by her mistress, who was too enfeebled even to inquire after her child. Harris flew with the welcome tidings to lord Mortimer, who exclaimed, in a voice of tremulous
G 2 gratitude—

gratitude—"My God, I thank thee!—Let it be disposed of, Harris, as I told you."

His too faithful domestic now returned, and conducted the doctor, blindfold as before, to the garden gate, where the horses were waiting. They mounted; the gentleman held in his arms the dead infant of the unfortunate countess.

When they came within a mile of the heath, Harris said—"I feel assured that I may trust you, sir, without my going any further." He then undid the bandage, when the gentleman, without making a reply, set spurs to his horse, and was out of sight in a moment. Harris thought this strange, yet attributed it to his desire of being with his wife; and as he felt no apprehensions of being followed, he returned to the Castle by the shortest way, not, however, without instinctively casting a look around him before he entered the stables.

The countess continued for an hour
too

too much exhausted to articulate her wishes. Mason hung over her with anxious solicitude, hoping she slept, and planning to herself the best way in which she could account to her for the absence of her child. Her beloved lady now moved; and Mason put her head down, to hear if she wanted any thing.

In a low faint voice, the countess said —“ My dear Mason, where is my infant? let me press it *once* to my bosom—that bosom which I had hoped—but it is ordained otherwise. Mason, be composed—listen to my last wish. See my Edmund—tell him that my last prayer was for him—that my love will continue beyond the grave—that my spirit will hover over and protect him from every ill—tell him that the terrors of death were softened down by our recent interviews, and that I die convinced that my memory will never be forgotten.—Let my child be brought up to devote itself to the father who was so sacredly dear to

its mother." She paused, from excessive weakness, and then continued—

“ Tell my father, Mason, that since he refused to see me while I had strength to support the interview, I would not urge it in my last moments. My death will atone for my fault—will procure my pardon. The generous Fitz-Aubin I leave guardian of my child—tell him also to remember the last wish of Althea.—Edmund, beloved, adored, even in death idolized, to God I commend thee in thy affliction!—Oh, Father of mercy! forgive—my idolatry—my disobedience—pardon, and receive my soul!”

Mason, in an agony of terror, screamed aloud for help; but the vital spark had fled.

CHAP. V.

JEM carried his fish as usual to the Castle, the closed windows of which, and the streaming eyes of the domestics, terrified this worthy rustic. The housekeeper told him to leave what he had brought—“May I be so bold as to ax after the countess?” said Jem, twirling his hat about.

Mrs. Sibthorpe’s tears flowed afresh—“Ah, Jem, the countess is an angel in heaven now.”

This was more than Jem’s fortitude could bear; he forgot his respect to Mrs. Sibthorpe, and seating himself in a chair, he sobbed aloud. Recovering himself, he begged pardon for the liberty he had taken; but, “upon his soul, he could not help it.”

The good housekeeper could have hugged Jem, for the feeling which he
G 4 displayed.

displayed. She gave him a glass of her best wine, and made him sit down again until he had drank it. "The lord ha' mercy on us!" cried Jem; "who'd a thought that one so young and good should be caught away from us so quick, just like, as I may say, the pretty flowers in the field, or the blossoms of the trees."

"Ah, Jem, she *was* good indeed; many a poor person has lost the stay of their family, now she's gone. She had no pride, no haughtiness—just like her mother, and there was not a dry eye for ten miles when *she* was taken from us. Oh, how bitter will be my lord's reflections!—I would not be him for all his money."

"And who will pluck up courage to tell her husband?" said Jem. "Ise sure it wont be I, for I shall blubber like a fool, I knows. I hope the poor baby is alive? that will be some comfort to him, poor man."

"No, Jem, the baby was born dead,
and

and my lady only lived about two hours afterwards."

"More's the pity," cried Jem, still sobbing. "Why, to lose wife and child all at once, is enough to make a man go wild and hang himself."

Jem now wiped away his tears, which, however, continued to run down his cheeks, and took a sorrowful leave of Mrs. Sibthorpe. He loitered home, ashamed to shew the humanity of his heart, and afraid to see either Dupree or his masters. The latter were anxiously watching for him before the house, and flew to meet him. Jem turned hastily away. The duke caught his arm—"Any letter, Jem?" said he, in a trembling voice. "How is the countess?"

"Don't know," replied Jem, trying to get away.

"What!" exclaimed Deloraine, "have you not been to the Castle this morning, Jem?"

“ I bees in a hurry, and can’t stop to talk now,” said Jem, hiding his face.

More and more alarmed, they drew him further from the farm, and besought him to tell them if he had heard how the countess was. Jem could stand it no longer; but, sobbing, said—“ I mun go, I mun go; do, pray ye, maister Belville, let I go.”

“ For God’s sake, Jem,” exclaimed the distracted Deloraine, “ do not torture me thus!—for God’s sake tell me the worst at once!”

Jem broke from them, and rushed into the farm. Deloraine and the duke looked at each other, for a few minutes, in speechless agony—“ Come, my dearest friend,” said his grace, taking the passive hand of Deloraine, “ the foolish conduct of this ignorant rustic has excited fears which may be groundless. I will question him again.”

Deloraine suffered himself to be led
into

into the house, where the first sight that met his eye was the mother and sisters of Jem crying as if their hearts would break, while, as the friends entered, Jem again endeavoured to escape. Deloraine seized the hand of dame Homely, and conjured her to tell him what was the matter.

“Don’t tell ’em, mother,” cried Jem, “pray don’t tell ’em.”

“Hold your tongue, you silly fellow,” said she; “why should I not tell the gentlemen that it has pleased God to take away from us our dear, dear countess?”

Deloraine heard no more; he staggered back a few paces, and fell into the arms of the duke, who was himself too much shocked to support him. The screams of the women brought Dupree to the assistance of his master.

“I thought how ’twould be,” said Jem. “I told you, mother, not to tell the husband of the countess she was dead.”

Dame Homely was no sooner informed of this unexpected relationship, than

she turned all her attention towards the unfortunate Deloraine. She helped Dupree to convey him to bed, while Jem was dispatched to the next town for the doctor. Almost lifeless himself, yet the duke would not quit his insensible friend; but true to the wish of the departed angel whom both adored, he watched by his bedside with unwearied solicitude, not taking his eyes off him, except to write these words to doctor Bennet:—

“ My poor friend requires your immediate presence. Our loss is irreparable—the angelic countess is no more.”

As soon as the doctor arrived, whom Jem had been sent to fetch, he opened a vein in the arm of his patient, which restored him to life. Unclosing his languid eyes on the melancholy face of his affectionate friend, Deloraine remembered his loss, and pressing the hand of the duke to his lips, sighing, said—“ I shall not trouble you long, Fitz-Aubin; my Althea waits to receive me in her arms ;

arms; see, see, she smiles upon me—she beckons me to follow her! I come, I come, my beloved, my wife!”

Again he sunk back motionless; and the doctor, who feared the effects of this severe relapse, requested that further advice might be had, mentioning the name of a physician who lived about ten miles from the village. Dupree was instantly dispatched to the house of doctor Sefton. The good-natured fellow made his horse fly; but the physician was sent for to attend lord Mortimer.

Dupree immediately returned, and calling at the Castle, requested to speak to the housekeeper. Judging that now the lovely countess was dead, her husband would not remain concealed, he begged her to inform the physician that his presence was required at Homely Farm, as soon as possible, to a gentleman who lay dangerously ill.

“ Ah,” said Mrs. Sibthorpe, “ I know who

who it is. God enable him to bear his double loss, for it is indeed a severe one!"

Dupree now hastened to his master, and was rewarded for his trouble and his speed by a handsome present from the duke, and what was of still greater value, his approbation of his conduct.

The physician soon came, and found Deloraine in the highest state of delirium. His cries and ravings soon informed him who he was, and the cause of his illness. Turning towards the duke, whose dignified aspect commanded respect—"I fear, sir," said he, "that this unfortunate young man will fall a victim to the fever which now consumes him. If he has any relations, it will be best to apprize them of his situation. You are perhaps nearly related to him yourself, and seem to require almost as much attention."

The duke, greatly agitated, scrupled not to avow his name and attachment to
the

the unhappy husband of the countess, stating that he had already sent off express to doctor Bennet, the uncle of the sufferer.

“ This is an unfortunate affair altogether,” replied the physician. “ I have just quitted lord Mortimer, who is almost distracted at the loss of his only child. From him I learned of her clandestine marriage, and the manner of her death. He seems uncommonly bitter against this gentleman, as the cause of all that has happened. I know only his story; but really it appears to me that his lordship has acted with great imprudence, I may say cruelty, towards his daughter. I know the family of doctor Bennet well, and should not have supposed, from some circumstances, that his lordship would have been so averse to the match.”

The duke, in justice to lord Mortimer, explained that he was still ignorant of the real parents of his friend—“ But,”
said

said his grace, with generous warmth, “ his own worth and exalted merits ought to have been sufficient to have excused his love, to a mind like lord Mortimer’s; my friend needed not the recommendation of a name—his talents and virtues ennobled himself.”

“ He is at least happy in possessing such friendship as yours; but I am seriously alarmed for his recovery, and hope his uncle will lose no time in obeying your summons.” Then taking from the medicine-chest of the duke what he thought proper, he made up some draughts, which he ordered to be given every two hours, and promised his grace to call again before night.

The situation of the affectionate duke was greatly to be pitied. He was himself much indisposed, from the shock he had received, yet, faithful to the desires of *her* for whom he had sacrificed all personal feelings, he refused to quit the side of the raving Deloraine, although Dupree earnestly,

earnestly entreated his master to let him supply his place. The females of the house also begged to be allowed to attend the object of universal sympathy; and poor Jem was as deeply interested in the fate of the sufferer as any of his family.

No alteration appeared likely to take place in the distracted husband of the much-lamented countess. The duke administered his draughts; but he continued to rave in the most dreadful way, calling on Heaven to avenge the murder of his wife and child. Doctor Seston gave no hopes of his recovery; and the tears of the farmer's family were redoubled by this intelligence.

The duke, almost exhausted, yet looked forward to the arrival of his uncle with some degree of hope. The worthy doctor Bennet lost not a moment in the journey; and the duke, worn out with watching and with sorrow, had hardly strength left to receive him. After he
had

had embraced his insensible nephew, he examined the prescription of his brother-physician, made some alteration in it, and mixing up a draught for the duke, besought him to retire to his own chamber and compose himself.

“ I will supply your place, my dear duke,” said he ; “ the spirit of the beloved angel, whose loss we now deplore, will rest satisfied with my attendance ; you want rest, to enable you to go through the duties of your guardianship. Leave the care of my nephew to me ; his fever must be conquered somehow or other, and then I shall entertain hopes of his yet getting over this terrible calamity.”

The duke felt that he could not refuse the wish of doctor Bennet ; he therefore took his prescription, and retired to his room, leaving his poor friend in the arms of his uncle, and attended by dame Homely and her eldest daughter. Nature was completely worn out ; and Dupree saw, with satisfaction, that his master-
soon.

soon fell into a sound sleep, which continued for several hours, and from which he rose refreshed and strengthened. His first movement was to the chamber of his friend, whom he found still the same; yet doctor Bennet gave him hope of a change, from the remedies he had applied.

No tender mother could watch over her only treasure with more solicitude than did the duke of Fitz Aubin over the husband of his adored countess. Every movement of his features was noticed by him with anxiety—his own existence seemed to depend on that of Deloraine.

At length, on the third day after the death of the countess, the fever abated, and her husband became sensible of the presence of his uncle and friend. Pressing a hand of each to his heart, he thanked them for their kindness, and expressed great satisfaction at seeing his uncle. He requested to sit up, which was immediately complied with; and dame Homely brought him her easy-chair, and pillowed it

it all round, to make it soft for him. The settled despair which his countenance exhibited alarmed his uncle even more than his ravings. He took his hand, while the duke held the other, and spoke to him of the loss he had sustained. Deloraine heard him unmoved; not a tear fell from his eyes. He conversed upon the unkind conduct of lord Mortimer, called him again the murderer of his wife and child, and seemed to feel enraptured at the idea of soon joining her in heaven. He beheld the emotions of the duke and his uncle—heard the sobs of the former, yet still preserved the same apathy.

As soon as he had retired to his bed, and was apparently asleep, the doctor said—
“It is now that I fear for the life of Edmund. Something must be done to compel him to shed tears, or he is lost. This dreadful want of feeling will either quickly bereave him of his senses or his existence. We must get him conveyed to the Castle—

tle—he must see the corpse of his wife; on that alone rests my hope of saving him.”

“ Dreadful alternative !” replied the duke, with a shudder of agony. “ Can nothing else be thought of ?”

“ Nothing,” said his uncle. “ I will go myself to the Castle, and procure the consent of lord Mortimer for my poor nephew to be admitted to see the loved remains of the wife he adores. But you, my dear duke, may well be spared this trial of your regard.”

“ I must accompany him,” replied his steady friend. “ Over the coffin of our mutually-beloved Althea will I renew my vow of affection to her husband; my presence may be of service to him in the hour of trial.”

Doctor Bennet pressed his hand warmly. Though deeply affected at the deplorable condition of his nephew, he nevertheless paid a just tribute to the glorious friendship of the affectionate Fitz-Aubin;

Aubin; then ordering his carriage, proceeded to pay his unpleasant visit to the Castle. It was with difficulty that he gained admittance to the presence of lord Mortimer, who indeed looked an object deserving of compassion, as he sat on a couch supported by his sister, lady Wilmington, herself the picture of grief.

No sooner was the meaning of his visit made known, and his relationship to the unfortunate Deloraine, than the earl immediately consented to his request, and acknowledged that he had carried his resentment too far—"Had I but known," said he, "that Dudley was the son of Elizabeth Bennet, I should have forgiven the injury his father did me, and, for the sake of his mother, would have loved the object of my poor child's affection. Pity me, doctor Bennet, for I am indeed deserving your commiseration. Stung to the soul by the idea that the only hope of my family had thrown herself away upon one whose parents might, when known,

known, call a blush upon her cheek, and enraged at his seeming duplicity and presumption, I determined to annul their marriage, and oblige her to give her hand to the duke of Fitz-Aubin, a man every way worthy of her."

"The duke," replied the physician, "is the best friend of my nephew; he is now with him, and has never quitted him since they came here. It was through the noble friendship of the duke that Edmund was enabled to see your daughter. Love conquers every obstacle, and laughs at dangers. My poor boy boldly scaled the walls of the Castle from the river, and entered at the window of his wife. Oh, my lord, had you been less stern—had you suffered your own natural feelings of affection to direct you, all might yet have been well, and we should not perhaps, as now, have to deplore a loss like that of the countess."

Lady Wilmington was obliged to leave the room.

"My

“ My deepest affliction,” said the miserable father, “ is, that I refused to see my beloved child—that she died without receiving my pardon, my blessing—and that my anger even extended towards the innocent infant, who I commanded, if born dead, to be removed, and buried privately by the person who attended her. I would now, were it possible, have it interred with its poor mother; but Harris tells me it was a stranger that attended on the countess.”

Doctor Bennet, shocked beyond measure at this fresh instance of the earl’s resentment, could scarce offer him the common condolencēs of humanity.

“ All that I can now do to atone for my fault,” said his lordship, “ is to devote the remainder of my days towards rendering those of your nephew comfortable. Do you think he will see me? do you think he will forgive the father of his Althea, and consent to pass with me the rest of his life, and supply the
place

place of my lost darling, my beloved daughter?"

"I will not deceive you, my lord," replied the doctor, "with any such hope. It will be long, if ever, before he recovers from the severe shock he has received. His high spirit will not let him accept favours from one who has been the cause of all his misery, and whose violent resentment proceeded from his not possessing a name that entitled him to your notice. Edmund will forgive as a Christian, but he will feel like a man, and I am certain, my lord, will always avoid your presence. Pardon me for what I have uttered; I should be wrong were I to deceive your lordship. His life depends upon this last hope, which I allow myself to cherish, that the sight of her he has so fondly idolized will call forth tears, which alone can save him."

The doctor now withdrew to his carriage, leaving lord Mortimer deeply af-

fectured by the visit, and the unexpected discovery that Dudley, the man he had thus persecuted, was the son of that Elizabeth whom he had so tenderly loved in his youth, and whose loss he had occasionally deplored ever since her elopement. His strong resemblance to captain Deloraine was now accounted for; and while he remembered the injury that gentleman had done him, he nevertheless felt his heart soften towards his son, for the sake of the mother. Most bitterly did lord Mortimer now lament to his sister his illiberal conduct, and scrupled not to accuse himself as having brought on the death of the countess by his ill-judged severity.

Lady Wilmington, although she felt that he had acted wrong, was too gentle and affectionate to reproach her brother. She pitied the deep affliction he was now suffering under; and, with great affection, determined, if she could not draw him

him from the scene of his distress, to send for her children and their tutor, and remain and share his sorrows.

Strongly attached to her departed niece, the marchioness was convinced that the earl would feel more keenly her loss each succeeding year; she considered it therefore as her duty to soften, as much as possible, the irreparable deprivation he had sustained, and generously resolved that nothing should be wanting on her part to render the remainder of his life, if not happy, at least comfortable and tranquil.

CHAP. VI.

THE next day doctor Bennet asked his nephew to go with him a short distance for an airing; and the duke and Dupree as-

sisted him into the carriage, and helped to support him. The experiment, in his debilitated state, was extremely hazardous; yet his uncle affirmed, that unless he could be made to weep, his recovery was impossible. Arrived at the Castle, they lifted him out; and carried him into the apartment which contained the remains of his wife. Deloraine, enfeebled, fainted as they placed him on a couch, yet, soon recovering, he gazed wildly around, then asked why he had been removed?

“ My dear nephew,” said his uncle, “ to-morrow your beloved Althea will be interred, and I thought you would like to see her for the last time.”

He stared vacantly at his uncle, then at the duke, who vainly tried to repress his sobs. Poor Mrs. Mason now came forward, and taking his hand, inquired if he did not know her?

“ Oh yes, you are the nurse of the
countess

countess of Brandon. But where is she? Why am I brought here? Whose coffin is that?"

"Let us carry him to it," said the doctor. "Be firm, my dear duke: support him, nurse—it is our last hope."

They now led him towards the sad receptacle of all human greatness. Mason drew back the pall, and uncovered the coffin. Beautiful as a sleeping angel appeared the lovely countess—a smile of heavenly resignation was visible on her countenance. The choicest flowers had been culled, to ornament her narrow mansion, and some of them were placed round her head, and gave a blush to her cheeks, which rendered the illusion more striking.

The duke scarce breathed; while Deloraine bent over the cold remains of his soul's idol, his uncle trembling with hope and fear for the event.

"It is my Althea!—my murdered wife!" he at length exclaimed, and burst-

ing into tears, fell back into the arms of his uncle,

“ Oh God ! I thank thee ! ” said doctor Bennet. “ My poor boy will yet live.”

Again the unfortunate husband of the countess raised himself from the shoulder of his afflicted friend, and hung over the beautiful corpse.

“ And art thou indeed torn from my fond arms ?—am I never more to hear thy sweet voice, or see thy angel eyes beam on me full of transport ? Oh, my murdered wife !—my Althea !—my adored ! Thy Edmund’s here—he calls thee. Alas ! alas ! she is no more ! ” Again his tears flowed passionately.

“ Where is my child ? *that* at least is spared me ; her cruel father has not murdered *that* too ? Speak, Mason, where is my child ? ”

“ In Heaven, with its mother, my dear Edmund,” replied his uncle. “ It has pleased God to afflict you thus heavily ;
but

but remember, my dear nephew, that it is the duty of a Christian to submit to his decrees."

Deloraine, almost lifeless, pressed his lips to those of his inanimate wife. He shuddered at the icy touch—"Yes, most adored," said he, raising his eyes and burning hands to Heaven, "thou said most prophetically, that when next we met, 'it would be for ever.' Oh, my angelic Althea, in Heaven we shall meet again; there no cruel father can divide our loves.—Fitz-Aubin, brother of my soul, art thou, too, here to take a last look at thy worshipped Althea? Oh, where is now the smile that thrilled us with rapture?—where the enchanting voice—the dove-like eye, that dissolved my soul in tenderness most exquisite? My poor baby gone—all—all torn from me—'tis hard—hard indeed!"

Exhausted, he sunk on the coffin; and the doctor thought it prudent to remove him, insensible as he was. On arriving

at the farm, he was put to bed; and his uncle afforded the duke the only consolation now left him, the hope that this slumber would be decisive.

According to his expectation, Deloraine awoke perfectly sensible, though much weakened. He called for his friend, who was sitting by his side, and looking at him earnestly, said—"Fitz-Aubin, have I been dreaming? or did I in reality behold the beloved form of my adored Althea?" The expressive features of the duke convinced him it was no dream, and he wept bitterly his irreparable loss.

As soon as the funeral of the countess was over, poor Mason, anxious to perform the last wish of her dear mistress, paid a visit to the wretched husband, who, while his grief was renewed by the sight of her, yet felt a melancholy pleasure in listening to the last request of his beloved Althea. He made her repeat at each visit the dying words of the coun-

icss;

tess; and his heart swelled with indignation at the inhumanity of her father in refusing to see her, and in sending away the innocent cause of her death.

Slowly he recovered, and began to walk in the garden of the farm, supported by the doctor and his grace; yet a deep and settled melancholy seemed to have taken possession of him. The beauties of nature, which he enthusiastically admired, no longer pleased; he was grateful for the kind attentions of the family; but he never smiled, except on the approach of the duke or his uncle, and they determined to remove him, as soon as they could do it with safety, to a spot which would not continually remind him of her he so ardently loved.

Lord Mortimer sent daily inquiries after his health, to which doctor Bennet returned a civil reply; but when he mentioned the attentions of his lordship, the blood rushed into the pale cheek of his nephew.

“What!” he exclaimed, “and does the murderer of my wife and infant mock me with his affected sympathy? No, no; it is the son of Elizabeth, not the neglected and injured husband of his daughter, that lord Mortimer now condescends to inquire after.”

“But, my dear Edmund, remember that lord Mortimer has also lost the last fond hope of his family; he acknowledges he has done wrong—he wishes to make you all the reparation in his power.”

“Reparation!” cried Deloraine, contemptuously, “oh, my dear uncle, what reparation can his lordship afford me?—has he not robbed me of all that was dear to me on earth?—has he not murdered my wife, and consigned my helpless infant to be thrown on some dungheap, instead of resting on the pure bosom of its mother?—oh, has he not done all this? and now to insult me with his willingness to make reparation—’tis more than human patience can endure! What can

can atone for the loss of her my heart doted on, and with whom I fondly hoped I should end my days?—What can atone for his having made the world become a desert to me, for his having torn from me my all of earthly happiness, my wife, my beloved, my adored Althea? Oh, my dear uncle, my noble friend, let us leave this place, which contains the remains of all that could render existence valuable, but which likewise contains the man whom I shall ever call her murderer.”

This was what his uncle wished for; but no sooner was their intended removal made known, than all the honest people expressed their sorrow at the thought of losing them, more particularly the husband of their revered countess. It however consoled them to be told by Deloraine that he wished to retain a chamber in the farm, to which he might return, for a short time, whenever he felt the inclination. The best room they had was immediately consigned to him, with an

earnest prayer that he would at least occupy it some part of every summer.

Jem, to whom Deloraine was attached, for the respectful love he bore the countess, and for the feeling he had evinced at her untimely fate, joyfully agreed to follow the fortunes of the melancholy wanderer. Such Deloraine intended to be; and for that reason, when Mrs. Mason testified some regret at the idea of quitting the Castle and the disconsolate earl, he forbore to press her on the subject, thinking that she would be more comfortable under the same roof that had sheltered her for so many years, than with him, who felt that it would be impossible to remain any settled time in one place.

Cicely was not the least who felt dispirited at the idea of their departure. She was too artless to conceal her feelings, and the tears rolled rapidly down her cheeks, while she sobbed as if her heart would break. Dupree was not only a pleasant

pleasant companion, but he was also an excellent young man. He had seen, with regret, the innocent proofs of Cicely's attachment, but honour forbade his taking advantage of them, or giving her the least reason to hope that he could love her in return. He saw her extreme distress with pity and tender compassion, and as he beheld her leave the room and turn into a lane by the side of the farm, he could not resist the humane impulse which urged him to follow, and, if possible, sooth her affliction.

Poor Cicely had flung herself down under the hedge, and, with her head half hid in her lap, was crying bitterly. Dupree's light step on the turf was not heard; and he was seated by her side before she was aware of his presence. Colouring deeply, she would have risen, but he prevented her; and taking her hand, kindly inquired what had thus agitated her?

“ Ah,

“ Ah, now you are only jeering me, Mr. Dupray; you knows well enough what bees the matter with I; and 'tishn't kind of you to make game of a poor country girl, whose heart's ready to burst, and all through you.”

“ Through me, Cicely! I should be miserable if I thought I had ever given you cause for this uneasiness. I have endeavoured, ever since I came to the farm, to treat you like a brother, and be assured, my dear Cicely, I shall ever love you as such.”

Cicely raised her eyes to his face—nature gave them an expression more touching than all the studied language of art. It shot through the soul of Dupree.

“ Dearest Cicely,” said he, throwing one arm round her waist, “ I will not appear to misconceive the meaning of those sweet eyes, which reproach me for my coldness and insensibility to such beauty as yours. Alas! my beating heart at this moment

moment proves to the contrary. Dry your eyes, dear Cicely, and hear my defence.

“ About six years ago, my father, who was a respectable tradesman, died suddenly, leaving my mother, with a large family, under great embarrassments. To assist in bringing up her children, she determined to turn dress-maker; and amongst those who honoured her by their commands, was the duchess of Fitz-Aubin. Struck with the manners of my mother, her grace inquired into her circumstances, and on learning her situation, benevolently sent two of my sisters to school, to have them perfected for teachers, or for any other line of life they might prefer.

“ I was then sixteen; my father had given me a good education, intending that I should follow his business; but this I disliked; and my mother was endeavouring to get me into some counting-house, when, fortunately for me, the duke

duke calling one day with his mother at our house, was pleased with my appearance, and after some conversation, inquired if I should like to accompany him on his travels? To this I joyfully consented; and have ever been treated by my noble master with distinguished kindness, not as a domestic, but as a confidential friend.

“ On our return to England, his grace was pleased to express a wish that I should continue with him, and I therefore accompanied him to Ireland, where the duchess then resided. During our stay there, I unfortunately became pleased with the person of a young woman, who was a sort of companion to the duchess. She looked the picture of all that is good and amiable, and I thought her even more than she seemed to be. The benevolent duchess was satisfied at her choice, since it would not deprive herself of an entertaining and accomplished companion, nor her son of one
whose

whose fidelity and attachment were well known. In an evil hour I became the victim of false appearances—I married, and found, too late, that I had been deceived.”

Poor Cicely uttered a scream, and sunk on his bosom. Dupree’s tenderness recovered her—“ Oh,” she exclaimed, wringing her hands bitterly, “ if you bees married, then indeed I bees wretched for ever !”

“ I hope not, dear Cicely,” said Dupree, greatly affected by the affection of this child of nature. “ God forbid that you should be wretched ! It was this, Cicely, that made me so guarded in my behaviour towards you. I knew it to be impossible for me to love you honourably, and I determined that you should never, if possible, have reason to think that I liked you better than your sister.”

Cicely sobbed aloud.

“ My dear girl, pray moderate your distress ; you distract me to see you thus ; I shall

shall be completely unhappy if I leave you with the painful fear of having unintentionally made you, for a time, uneasy."

"Oh, don't mock me, Mr. Dupray, don't mock me; I bees a foolish girl, and a vain girl, ever to think such a one as you could love a poor silly country maid. You will forget Cicely and her uneasiness when you bees in Lunnun, or else laugh at her folly with your wife."

"You wrong yourself," said Dupree, thrown off his guard; "I swear never to forget you, Cicely—no, my dear girl, I love you too sincerely to laugh at you—too dearly to forget you."

He pressed her to his bosom, and, for the first time, kissed her lips. Cicely's heart beat violently; she would have been too happy in this discovery, had she not recollected that he had a wife, and that she was therefore infringing on the rights of another. Disengaging herself from the arms of him she doted on, she said, while the blush of shame heightened her

her beauty—"I was only silly a while ago, but now I bees wicked. Ah, Mr. Dupray, you have a wife, and must keep your kisses for her."

"No, Cicely, she deceived me. I will maintain her—I will protect her from injury or insult; but my kisses are no longer hers."

"Oh, don't say so—don't say so. Who should you love but your wife? I should die broken-hearted if I was she, and you did not love me."

"Yes, my sweet girl, but you would not have cheated me as she has done—you would not have married me if your heart had been another's, and if you had born a child to another man; would you not have told me so, Cicely?"

"Oh dear! dear! that I would; but was she indeed so wicked as to hide from you that she had had a baby?"

"Yes, Cicely, I knew not of what I should have termed her misfortune, (had she honestly confessed it to me before

our

our marriage,) until the night of our wedding, when she returned my caresses with tears and sobs. At length I learnt that she had been seduced by the artifices of a villain, son to the lady who had taken her as companion to her daughters, and that she was only seventeen when she became the mother of a boy, who died in his infancy. The lady was so hurt at the baseness of her son in ruining a young creature under her protection, that she immediately settled on her a hundred a-year; but, of course, she did not remain any longer in the family.

“ Had she acted towards me with sincerity and honour, I should have pitied her, Cicely, for falling a victim to the arts of her lover; but to conceal a thing of so much importance, until after our marriage, was so base, so deceitful, that I felt for her no longer that affection which had led to my ruin.

“ I sat up all the night of our ill-fated nuptials—my mind was distracted—my heart

heart disappointed in its dearest hopes; yet I told her she had nothing to fear from my anger—her secret should remain safe with me—I would keep her as my wife, but that the whole world should never induce me to consider her as such. Her good conduct since that fatal night has, I confess, gained my esteem. I pity her situation, and willingly do all I can to make her comfortable; but I cannot love her, for her want of confidence in my honour and principles.

“ Thus you see, my dear Cicely, that my hard fortune has tied me to one I cannot live with as a wife, and separated me from another, whose innocence and artless tenderness would make me happy.”

“ I do pity ye, I do indeed,” said Cicely, sobbing again, “ and I do pity her, though she did wrong in deceiving you. Oh, I should break my heart quite to have such a husband and not live with him.”

Dupree again caught her to his breast
—“ I love

—“ I love you, Cicely ; I feel now all the cruelty of my lot, since, were I single, I would prefer my sweet country maid to all the women I have ever seen.”

“ And must I lose you ? ” inquired Cicely, with a voice of melting softness. “ Oh dear, I shall die—I know I shall die, if I must lose you.”

This was too much for Dupree. His arms encircled the waist of Cicely—her face was pressed to his—and her white bosom was discernible through the handkerchief, which was now partly removed from her neck. Dupree felt the power of her charms and of her tenderness. The love of this innocent girl was capable of affording him the highest happiness, of rewarding him for the deprivations he had suffered in his domestic concerns ; yet how was he to become master of it ? by the ruin of an artless and confiding heart, that doted on him with trusting fondness ?

“ No,” said he, pressing his lips to hers,

hers, " may I perish, Cicely, if I take advantage of thy affection ! I cannot make thee my *wife*—I will not degrade thee by making thee my *mistress*."

Then raising her from the ground, he continued—" Dearest Cicely, dry your tears. You will always be dear to me. I promise to see you again before long ; endeavour to let your domestic duties restore you to your usual cheerfulness. Jem will, ere long, revisit you and his family, and then I will accompany him ; and I shall hope, dearest Cicely, to find you happy as when I first saw you."

Cicely felt somewhat more resigned at this promise of Dupree's. She wiped away her tears, and tried to smile, but her heart was too full—" I shall never do any good any more at home," said she, " and I wish you would try and get me some place in Lunnun, for I shall never like home any more."

Dupree, alarmed at this proposal, got her to promise that she would not quit home,

home, unless she first consulted him, and that she would, at all events, stay until she saw him again.

“ But be you in earnest now? and will you indeed come back to the farm?”

“ Yes, on my soul, I will, Cicely. My master will not refuse me leave, I am confident; nay, it is most likely that when Mr. Deloraine comes down, he will come with him; if not, you may still depend on seeing me.”

“ I hope there’s no harm,” said Cicely, “ in coming down to see I. God knows my heart, I would not injure your wife, nor seek to ’tice you from her; but if you do not live with her as husband and wife, why, it can’t harm her your coming to see I.”

“ No, dearest Cicely, you will never do her any harm, or any body else, wilfully, I am sure. She is in a bad state of health, and her own reflections help to make her worse. Ill as she has treated me, I do not allow her to want for any thing

thing that can restore her; but I assure you, Cicely, that I do not expect she is long for this world."

"Poor creature," exclaimed the kind-hearted girl, very innocently, and without any second meaning, "it will be a good thing if it please God to take her. To be married, and not live with her husband, is sad—sad work indeed! Mayhap, if she dies, you will marry some fine lady, and never think of coming back to the farm."

"And do you really think so, Cicely? Have I not told you that I love you? and do you disbelieve me? No, my dear girl, whatever may be my circumstances, you shall see me again."

They now returned to the farm, where Cicely longed for night to come, that she might disclose to her affectionate Susan the conversation which she had had with her lover; and Dupree congratulated himself upon the victory he had gained over his passions and inclinations—"Never,"

thought he, "should I have been at peace with myself, had I taken advantage of the artless affection of my dear Cicely—had I, villain like, consulted my own selfish feelings, and seduced her from the paths of innocence and virtue, to gratify my own prepossession. No, sweet child of Nature, I would not rob thee of thy virgin honour—I would not bereave thee of that treasure, which makes thee inestimable in my eyes—I would not plant in thy pure bosom a thorn, which no time or art can ever extract. Did all men think as I do, I should not now have to lament the ruin of my domestic happiness, nor would the unfortunate being who was first deceived, and then deceived me, now regret, when too late, her easy confidence in a villain, and her want of faith in the affection of him whom she has herself betrayed." The meditations of Dupree were interrupted by the voice of his master, who requested him to ride over to where his carriage and servants had been

been left, and order them to be at the farm on the morning of the second day.

Doctor Bennet was pleased by this readiness of his nephew to leave a spot which could not but retard his entire recovery. He proposed to take him to London, and introduce him to those of his relations who resided in the metropolis, and who were already anxious to welcome him into their family. The worthy doctor likewise meant to retire from the fatigues of his profession, and to dedicate the remainder of his life to his beloved nephew, the restoration of whose health and happiness was now his only concern.

Deloraine prepared to leave the hospitable family of the farmer, every individual of which felt eager to manifest respect and affection; while Jem could not contain his joy and exultation at being permitted to follow the fortunes of one so universally beloved.

The evening before their departure,

Deloraine proposed to the duke that they should walk part of the way home with Mrs. Mason, who had called upon him as usual. To this his grace assented, and as the weather was serene and beautiful, his uncle raised no objection to the desire of his nephew. They accordingly proceeded towards the Castle, Deloraine strictly charging Mrs. Mason to write to him, should any thing occur to render her residence there unpleasant, promising, on his part, to see her once every year in the month of August.

The duke looked inquiringly at his friend, who pressed his hand affectionately—"My dear Fitz-Aubin, you seem surprised; yet can you wonder that *I*, who have loved so passionately, should resolve to visit every year the tomb of her who alone made me wish to live? Even now I purpose to take a look at all that is left me of her I adore.—Mason, can you lead me unnoticed into the private chapel of the Castle? I shall not
depart

depart satisfied unless I am permitted to enjoy this melancholy privilege."

Mrs. Mason now conducted them, by a retired path, to that part of the grounds which contained the chapel, and leaving them for a few minutes, returned with the key. The duke remembering the solemn bequest of the sainted countess, endeavoured to command all his fortitude to support her husband, who trembled violently as he entered the gloomy mansion, which contained the mortal remains of his wife.

Deloraine knelt by the side of the tomb—his excessive agitation kept him silent for some minutes. At length he exclaimed, in a voice of tremulous tenderness, " Althea, my sainted love—my wife—my adored wife, whom it has pleased Heaven to take from these widowed arms, oh look down from thy blissful abode upon thy Edmund—upon him who was the object of thy dearest and constant love! For me thou didst vo-

luntarily sacrifice every thing—for me thou diedst!” He paused for a moment, then dashing off the falling tears, he continued—

“ Angel of purity, hear my vow ! Never, oh never shall thy loved idea be mingled with that of a second passion—never, most adored ! will thy Edmund seek for an alleviation to his woes in the smiles or the caresses of another. Here, on this cold marble, which contains all that his heart idolized, he swears to relinquish every worldly gratification, to live secluded from the allurements of female beauty, and to nourish alone the remembrance of thy matchless love. Yes, dear Althea !” said he, raising his fine blue eyes to heaven, “ thy Edmund, true to the memory of thy unspeakable affection, swears also to visit once a-year this sad receptacle of youth and beauty, and to regulate his conduct for the future, in the hope of meeting thee one day in Heaven.”

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He sunk on the shoulder of the duke, who, folding him in his arms, said, in a broken voice—"Spirit of her whom we both adored, oh receive also the solemn vow of Fitz-Aubin! In this awful moment, and in the belief that thou art permitted to witness our present sufferings, hear me declare that it shall be the study of my life to fulfil thy last request—that the happiness of thy Edmund shall ever be my first consideration—and that, like him, I swear never to violate the sanctity and purity of my attachment by wedding another!"

Deloraine returned the embrace of Fitz-Aubin; they rose, and locked in each other's arms, stood for a time silently contemplating the tomb of their beloved countess, then accompanied by Mason, quitted the chapel.

On their way back they were met by doctor Bennet, who gently chid his nephew for staying out so long; then said,

smilingly, to his friend—"I will not trust our Edmund with you again, my dear duke, if you suffer yourself to be overruled by his persuasions."

He was no sooner informed of the cause of their stay, than all his fears revived. Deloraine, however, rose the next morning apparently not the worse for his melancholy visit; and in order to calm the apprehensive kindness of his uncle, put on an air of constrained cheerfulness, which gratified both the doctor and the generous duke of Fitz-Aubin.

The carriages now drove up to the door of the farm-house. Jem hugged his mother and sisters, then craved his father's blessing; while Dupree ill concealed his vexation, at seeing the tears stream from the eyes of the fond Cicely. His master and his friends now appeared. Their generosity had not been of the niggard kind; and the compassionate dame and her handsome daughters received

weighty

weighty proofs of their gratitude for the humanity they had so readily shewn towards Deloraine.

While the gentlemen were busily engaged with the mother, Dupree contrived to speak unobserved to Cicely, and to assure her that she should see him again in the course of a few months, and to receive her promise once more of remaining at home until that period. Dupree only feared that this innocent creature should, from the disappointment of her wishes, be tempted to quit a comfortable home, and expose herself to the vice and contamination of the metropolis; to avoid which, he promised to visit again the farm, to save her from ruin, not to be the cause of it.

Cicely envied Jem, and almost wished that she could put on his clothes, and become the companion of her dear Dupree, whom she now saw ready to mount his horse. He had taken leave of all the

family—kissed her sister, and prepared to do the same to her.

“ Don’t forget me,” said Cicely, in a whisper, as she felt the pressure of his lips; “ don’t forget me, for I shall have no rest till I see thee again.”

“ Do not suspect me of that, dearest Cicely,” said he; “ the time will seem long until we meet again;” then vaulting on his horse, he departed from the hospitable farm, amidst the tears of Cicely and the prayers of her mother, who felt for him a regard truly maternal.

It required all the united attentions of the duke and doctor Bennet to prevent the mind of Deloraine from sinking into despondency during their journey. It was impossible for him not to contrast the present with that time, when, full of love, hope, and rapturous expectation, he had travelled the same road, in the sweet idea of being reunited to his Althea. His friends perceived his increasing

ing melancholy ; and when they stopped for refreshment, ordered the servants to proceed by another route. This, in some degree, had the desired effect ; and they arrived in town with the satisfaction of seeing Deloraine tolerably composed.

The duke reluctantly quitted him, after he had staid with him some hours ; yet in leaving his friend at the house of his uncle, with whom he was now to reside, he felt assured that he was safe, and in the care of one tenderly attached to him ; he could also call on him daily ; and he suffered himself to hope that in time he might be brought to visit at his mother's, and to mix a little with that world which he was so preeminently formed to adorn.

CHAP. VII.

DELORAINÉ's first wish now was, to procure from the treacherous Courteney the two letters of the countess, which he had so perfidiously withheld from him; yet unwilling to call at the marchioness's during her absence, he preferred attempting to recover them through the means of another channel. He therefore ordered his uncle's coachman to drive to the humble abode of Mrs. Courteney.

Sybella and her sister were sitting down to a scanty dinner, when the chariot of doctor Bennet arrived. Hurrying away the things, they prepared to receive the lady, who they supposed had called about some baby-linen which they had in hand. The appearance, however, of their old friend most agreeably disappointed them, and they eagerly flew to receive him with their accustomed good nature

nature and kindness. His pale looks and the deep mourning which he wore, called forth the ready tear into each eye. He was not less agitated. Recovering himself, he inquired of Sybella when she had seen her husband, or if she expected him? To this she replied, that he had set off that morning with his pupils for Mortimer Castle, and that his time was so much engaged, that she seldom saw him since his residence at the marchioness's; he had, however, called on her the evening before his departure.

“Then you are acquainted, my dear Sybella, with my irreparable loss?” said Deloraine, in a faint voice.

The tears of the sisters were their only reply.

Deloraine raised his eyes—he saw their sincere distress—he took a hand of each, and pressing them affectionately, said—
“I know the goodness of your hearts, my kind friends—I see that your friendship remains unchanged, pure and uncontaminated

taminated by the perfidy and baseness of Leopold. You seem surprised, Sybella; believe me that I am pained to wound your tenderness, by discovering the treachery of your husband, of one whom I was sincerely attached to, and to whom I fearlessly confided every secret of my bosom. How he has rewarded my affection, you have yet, perhaps, to learn."

Deloraine, with as much delicacy as the circumstance would allow, now repeated as much of Courteney's hypocrisy and baseness as had come to his knowledge, and scrupled not to assert, that he was authorized, from his conduct respecting the letters of the countess, to lay the whole of his misery to his account.

Sybella, though she too well gave credit to the veracity of Deloraine, yet endeavoured to vindicate her absent husband. The concealment of the letters was however again brought forward as chief evidence against him, and she was
compelled

compelled to advocate his cause no longer. Her sister took advantage of her quitting the room, to express her indignation at the duplicity of her brother-in-law, and his cruel neglect of his wife and family, whom, she said, he now appeared scarcely to remember belonged to him.

“Poor Sybella,” she continued, “would willingly hide all his faults, and put up silently with his want of common affection; but I cannot endure to see her and her dear children treated as they are. Leopold has scarce given her any thing towards their support, since he has been at lady Wilmington’s. He says that he requires all that he has to make him appear like a gentleman, and that we must do as well as we can without his assistance; then he calls on us so very seldom, and when he does, he takes such little notice of my sister and the children, that I declare I am broken-hearted on their account.”

“Unnatural villain!” exclaimed Deloraine;

loraine; " I could sooner forgive his baseness towards myself, than his brutality to you and his family. But do not despair, Maria; although *he* has forfeited all claim to my notice or lenity, yet I will still befriend his family to the utmost of my power."

Sybella now returned with her children, to whom Deloraine made handsome presents, to buy, as he said, toys and cakes, while the appearance of the poor infants, thus deserted by their natural protector, spoke most forcibly that the friendly gift would be better expended. Deloraine recounted the agreeable discovery he had made of his family; and on mentioning that the chariot belonged to his uncle, with whom he should in future reside, Maria could not forbear exclaiming—" Were Leopold here, he would receive fresh cause for envy and discontent."

A look from Sybella reproved her. She, though suffering most severely from
the

the unkindness of her husband, yet could not bear to hear him spoken ill of. Turning towards Deloraine, she warmly congratulated him on his possessing so worthy a relation as doctor Bennet, and assured him, that she had not been so happy for a long while as she now was, on hearing of his having discovered what she knew had always been a source of vexation to him, the name and quality of his parents.

Deloraine took leave of this neglected woman and her sister with undiminished esteem, secretly determined that *they* at least should not suffer ultimately by the conduct of the hypocrite.

“ Ah, my dear Edmund,” said his uncle, “ did I not tell you that Mr. Courteney was either one of the best or the worst of men ? ”

“ You did indeed, my good uncle ; and I have too fatally proved him to be the latter. His desertion, for so it may be termed, of his amiable wife and her helpless

helpless children, shews him in his true colours. I knew her before she was married to him, and am well acquainted with the obligation he was under to her family. His present neglect of her is unpardonable, and if he persists in it, his wife shall find that the man whom her husband has irreparably injured, will be her best friend and protector."

"Noble Edmund!" cried the delighted physician, "this is worthy of you; yet be cautious, my dear boy, that in assisting the wife of your malignant enemy; you do not give him room to misrepresent the purity of your intentions."

A faint colour overspread the manly face of Deloraine—"He is capable of even that," said he; "and for the sake of the worthy woman, whom I would preserve from the horrors of want, I will be on my guard against the base insinuations of her husband. For her sake also, I will be silent on my own injuries. He may be more faithful to his employer than

than he was to me. I could easily remove him from the situation he now holds, but such poor revenge I despise ; no, let him remain, and profit by the ease and comfort he daily enjoys. A time will come when his own conscience will be my avenger."

Courteney, meanwhile, was not perfectly free from the pangs of remorse. He had betrayed the generous friend to whom he was bound by every tie of gratitude and honour. He had succeeded in separating him from the idol of his soul, and had coolly planted a dagger in the heart of one whose friendship was of the noblest kind. The sudden death of the lovely and injured countess awakened in his bosom sentiments of momentary regret. Involuntarily her image, all beautiful, all friendly as it was, would at moments flit across his mind ; and the remembrance of the base and cowardly part he had acted towards her haunted his imagination ; yet he cheered himself
with.

with the delightful certainty, that the *proud, presuming, and too-daring* Edmund was now punished for his ambition—that he was no longer the petted treasure of the *weak young countess*, and that all his dreams of grandeur were now annihilated.

Cold, selfish, and unfeeling; he was alike indifferent to the agonies of her father, the tears of her aunt, or the mild reproachful looks of his own neglected wife. Constancy in conjugal attachment was a virtue known only to him by name, and so little regarded by this man of *morality*, that he scrupled not to violate his marriage vow within a few weeks after the consummation of his nuptials. During his residence under the same roof with his wife, he however deemed it prudent to preserve some appearance of decency, and thought it likewise best to conceal from her knowledge his various amours.

Escaped from the eyes of his wife, and
the

the penetration of his sister, he congratulated himself that he was now at liberty, and possessed the means of giving full scope to his inclinations. He had frequently, when at home, strayed out for several days without accounting for his absence ; and though he cared not for the uneasiness this gave his wife, yet as he *lived well* while away, he disliked the return to that circumscribed mode of subsisting, which his injured family were compelled to adopt. Selfish even in his amours, Courteney's delicacy felt no alarm at receiving favours, even of a pecuniary nature, from the unfortunate beings whose virtue he had seduced. He uniformly represented himself as a single man, well knowing that none but the most depraved and abandoned would listen to the love of a married man ; nor is it improbable that to some less yielding than others, he promised marriage, as a future indemnification for the loss of their honour.

Though

Though neither handsome nor elegant, yet he possessed rather a gentlemanly appearance, was always particularly neat and clean in his person and dress, and had acquired the fatal art of making the “worst appear the better reason.” With women in the middling class of life, he was too generally successful. They were flattered by the notice of a man of talent, who condescended to immortalize them in verse, and whose devout and sincere mode of conduct made them look on him as a man of ten thousand. *He was single also*, and might be induced to marry them. How enviable such a destiny!

The ruin of many an innocent and confiding heart sat light on the mind of the hypocrite—“Fools,” he would say, to one *almost* as base as himself, “let them thank themselves—I have no gold to lure them to their fate—they yielded readily to the allurements of my person, and the persuasion which dwells on my tongue. Their ruin be on their own heads!”

"heads!" Nor was he more delicate with respect to the *names* of those unfortunate victims of his duplicity. With unmanly exultation would he boast of his conquests, not concealing the family of *her* whose misery he was thus wantonly sporting with.

To his wife he pleaded want of time as an excuse for seeing her so seldom; but the truth was, that his leisure evenings were devoted to a less innocent pursuit than the education or even amusement of his pupils. Lady Wilmington had a very pretty girl, as under nursery-maid to lady Caroline, and this young woman was the *first* in the family who fell a victim to the artifices of Courteney. Unwilling that any thing should by chance occur to raise suspicion of his religious principles, he persuaded the credulous Sally to leave her situation, and get another in a pastry-cook's shop, where he could have frequent opportunities of seeing her, unknown to the marchioness.

Between

Between this girl, and one still more suited to his fancy, his evenings were passed ; and those hours which were supposed to be devoted to his wife and family, were thus spent in the gratification of his vicious inclinations; and the money which would have procured them many little comforts, was wasted, not on the poor deluded girl whom he had seduced, but on the woman who, with a soul black like his own, unfeelingly assisted to dissipate that which belonged in justice only to his injured family.

This creature, who in reality possessed considerable influence over the mind of Courteney, was a school-fellow, and once a friend, of his wife. She was now become a fancy dress-maker, and contrived to support herself very genteelly. With her the husband of Sybella spent the most of his time, and with her he enjoyed all the comforts of a *nice hot supper*, which she never omitted to procure for him whenever he paid her a visit. Attached

tached to her as much as his wandering nature would permit, she had not, however, the power of keeping him wholly to herself; and she felt, therefore, no trifling uneasiness on his informing her of the summons he had received from the marchioness. Poor Sally, and his wife and family, he took leave of with little regret; but he experienced some unpleasant sensations on bidding adieu to his favourite, and in the idea of her probable infidelity during his absence. It was, however, unavoidable, and he therefore prepared to leave London with his pupils, their sister, and a steady middle-aged woman, her nurse.

The arrival of the children gave relief to the heart and mind of lady Wilmington, while the presence of these innocent prattlers at first renewed the deep distress of lord Mortimer. In a few days, however, they began to amuse him; and to lord Edwin he in particular attached himself, declaring that he should, with the

consent of his sister, adopt the boy, and bestow on him all the immense property he had the power of bequeathing. This of course was highly gratifying to the marchioness, as it amply provided for her beloved son, and greatly increased the fortune of lady Caroline.

Courteney exulted to find that he had not lost the favour of the earl, by the share he had had in the melancholy fate of his daughter. Lord Mortimer received him with an increase of regard—spoke to him, without reserve, upon what affected him deeply—recapitulated all the sad incidents attending the death of the countess—and finally revived the envy of Leopold, by the discovery of *who* were the parents of the supposed orphan.

Stung to the soul, it was with difficulty Courteney could have recourse to his accustomed dissimulation. The lovely countess was dead; yet Edmund's ruin was incomplete. He was possessed of
fortune,

fortune, kindred, friends, of every thing which had made *him* his enemy, every thing but Althea—"Well do I know the fool," said he to himself. "All these advantages, which would render a wise man happy, will be thrown away upon him. Bereft of his doting wife, the pleasures of the world will be viewed by him with disgust; nor should I be surprised if, with his *romantic* notions, he were to forswear all future intercourse with the sex, and sacrifice himself to the memory of his adored countess."

The deep dissimulation of Courteney enabled him to put on an air of sorrow, which well accorded with the feelings of the family; all respected him and treated him with great attention, except Mrs. Mason, who shunned his presence, and who never mentioned his name. Remembering his cruel concealment of the letters, yet ignorant in other respects of his treachery, she could not view him with composure; and her agitation was

so ill concealed, that the hypocrite perceived, in the affectionate nurse of the countess, one who was no friend to him. This, however, gave him little concern. He felt that he had gained too firmly the good opinion of the earl and his sister, for the dislike of Mason to have any weight with them; yet he artfully lost no opportunity of inquiring after her health, and of speaking to her with a kindness so marked, that she insensibly began to look on him with less dislike, and though she could not account for his withholding the letters, she thought it might be possible that he was not quite the deceitful character, or treacherous friend, Deloraine had supposed him.

Courteney had now the dull prospect of passing his winter at the Castle. Lord Mortimer could not be persuaded to quit it; and lady Wilmington willingly offered to give up all the gaieties of the metropolis, and remain with her afflicted brother. How then was he to amuse himself?

himself? It would be dangerous were he to tamper with the chastity of any of the females employed in the Castle, since it was of the highest importance that he should preserve his character for devotion and morality; yet to pass so many months without the stolen pleasures of intrigue, was to him impossible, and he therefore determined to seek among the tenantry for an object, in whose society he could beguile some of the tedious hours of his solitude, wisely determining, however, not to let his passions get the better of his prudence.

He had occasionally accompanied lady Wilmington and her children to the village on visits of charity, and as they always stopped at farmer Homely's, he had seen more than once the rustic beauties of the farm. Attracted by the handsome persons of Cicely and Susan, he was at a loss which to fix on for the subject of his muse, therefore determined to lay siege to them both. Accordingly he

contrived in general to walk that way with his pupils, who, if seen by dame Homely, never failed to receive her caresses, and to be invited with their tutor to partake of some home-made cake and wine.

The grave and pious demeanour of Courteney won the heart of the unsuspecting mother, and she felt herself bound to him for ever for his kind offer of instructing her son, a boy about twelve years old, to read and write and cast accounts. Courteney did not think proper to conceal his marriage from this family; he, on the contrary, often mentioned his wife in terms of praise, and lamented, with well-feigned regret, their separation. Dame Homely, as well as her husband, believed him all that he appeared to be, and thought themselves highly honoured by his affability and condescension. They treated him with the best their house afforded; and their honest hearts throbbed with joy at the prospect

prospect of Bill's being made a scholar, and enabled to do something better than follow the plough.

Courteney found the society of this good-natured farmer and his family more entertaining than sitting alone in his own chamber during the absence, or bedtime, of his pupils; and he generally contrived to pass two or three of his evenings in a week at Homely Farm, always preserving a line of conduct so steady and reserved towards Cicely and her sister, that their parents would have trusted them even to London and back again with him. Under his direction, the artless daughters of the farmer improved greatly in their reading and writing. He even brought them books from the Castle, and took care that they were uniformly of a religious tendency.

The fame of his sanctity and goodness soon found its way to the knowledge of lord Mortimer and his sister—"This man is inestimable," said the earl; "we must

contrive, Caroline, to retain him in the family. I grow more and more attached to him, and would give any thing that he were a single man." He then added, with a sigh, " I have already suffered too severely from separating man and wife."

" And yet, my dear brother, Mr. Courteney suffers no greater deprivation than our brave soldiers and sailors, nor indeed so much, since I shall hope still to enjoy your presence some part of the year in London, when he will be enabled to see his family as usual."

The earl sighed—" Your generous resolution of giving up for me, my sister, all the pleasures of the gay world, calls for an equal sacrifice on my part. Let us but remain at the Castle this winter, and the ensuing spring I will accompany you where you please."

Lady Wilmington embraced her brother tenderly. This was more than she had looked for; and now that he had agreed to leave the Castle, she suffered herself

herself to entertain hopes of his recovering, in the course of time, his accustomed health and spirits. But lady Wilmington had yet to learn that her brother had a second inducement to leave occasionally his retirement. The memory of Elizabeth Bennet had ever been dear to him, and now that he had discovered that a child of hers existed, it became the first and strongest wish of his heart to associate with her son, and to bestow on him the long-hoarded affection which he had cherished for his mother.

To conquer the resentment of Deloraine, and to gain his former regard, was now the principal motive which influenced the conduct, and regulated the desires of lord Mortimer. He therefore resolved to yield to the affectionate wish of his sister, who was indeed too young and too handsome to be wholly estranged from society.

Courteney was not a little delighted when his lordship informed him of his
K 5 resolution

resolution to vary the scene; yet his pleasure was soon damped, by the painful idea of Deloraine not only being restored to the favour of the earl, but enjoying more than ever his confidence and affection. He would have instantly begun a plan to prevent this circumstance taking place, had he not remembered the high and independent spirit of Deloraine, which he had so often condemned, but which *now* he secretly rejoiced that he possessed.

Dame Homely, true to her promise, kept it a secret that the husband of the injured countess had a room at her house. So dear to the farmer's family was the memory of this departed angel, that Courteney found himself obliged to be on his guard; whenever either her name or that of his betrayed friend was mentioned. From Susan he learnt what her mother had concealed, as well as the intention of Deloraine to visit the farm once a-year. He instantly comprehended the meaning

meaning of this visit, and rejoiced that it would happen at a time when, in all probability, he should be far distant.

Courteney was now sure of the good opinion of the farmer's family. He therefore thought fit to begin his diabolical plans on the innocent sisters, who revered him as much as if he had been their pastor. He easily discovered that the virtue of Cicely was proof against all his artifices; it was invulnerable; the remembrance of Dupree, and the strong affection she bore him, shielded her from the baneful effects of his eloquence and persuasion. Susan, however, had no such guard to protect her innocence; she was courted by the son of a wealthy miller, who came every Sunday to accompany her and Cicely to church, and then spent the remainder of the day with her at the farm.

The plain and honest language of the young miller became displeasing to Susan, when she had once listened to the

more refined professions of Courteney. To these artless girls he now represented himself as single, giving it for a reason why he acknowledged himself otherwise, that many would scruple at receiving an unmarried man into their family, and that it likewise entitled him to more respect and confidence. This they readily believed, and promised faithfully not to divulge. Cicely favoured his private conversations with her sister, since he avowed his affection to be honourable; and to doubt *his* veracity, *his* sincerity, was almost to doubt the truth of the Bible.

Susan already loved him, and Cicely esteemed him next to Dupree. The wily hypocrite would sit and listen to the untutored tenderness of the latter; he would console her for the absence of her lover, and even wipe away her tears with the chaste tenderness of a brother, while in his heart he secretly hoped that Dupree might never return, and that Cicely
would

would become the victim of his dissimulation. The benevolence of Heaven, however, directed it otherwise, and for once the plans of this modern Janus were defeated.

Already had the dreariness of winter given place to the enchanting verdure of spring. The heart of Susan was light and cheerful as the season, while that of her sister was heavy and full of care. Nearly eight months had elapsed, and no tidings had come direct from Dupree. Her brother Jem had mentioned him sometimes in his letters; but this was not sufficient to encourage the hopes of Cicely, who now began to despair of ever seeing him again, and to fear that he had forgotten her.

Courteney took advantage of this despondency. His visits to the farm were become more frequent, and the weather now allowed of his walking with the sisters in the lanes and fields near the farm. It was during a walk one evening in the

very lane in which Dupree had confessed his affection for Cicely, that, unable to restrain her tears, she pointed out to him the spot on which they had sat and conversed. Overcome by the recollection of that moment, and the dread that she might never again behold her lover, Cicely sobbed aloud, while Susan and Courteney endeavoured to console her.

“ Dear sister, for such I trust you will one day be,” said the hypocrite, clasping her in his arms, “ dry those tears, which cut me to the soul.” Then whispering in her ear, “ If you have lost *one* lover, Cicely, you need not look far for another.”

He attempted to kiss her, but springing from his arms, though not in anger, she said—“ You mustn’t kiss me, Mr. Courteney, for no one but Dupree shall ever kiss me again.” Courteney indemnified himself on the lips of Susan, who, covered with becoming blushes, modestly returned his affected passion.

A scream

A scream from Cicely called off their attention from each other. Springing forward, she exclaimed—" 'Tis he—'tis his self!" and sunk breathless in the open arms of Dupree.

"Dearest Cicely," said he, pressing her to his bosom, "you see I have kept my word. I am come back to the farm with only one companion, but I hope to carry two away with me."

Cicely raised her head from his shoulder—she saw that he was in mourning; but the presence of Courteney, who now advanced with Susan, prevented her reply. With one arm round her waist; Dupree conducted her home; while Courteney more vexed than he chose to acknowledge, left them at the door, and the happy Cicely still wept; but her tears were now the effects of unexpected happiness.

Dame Homely and the farmer were rejoiced to see once again the entertaining Dupree; the best seat was assigned him,

him, and the best wine was drawn to welcome the return of Jem and his agreeable friend. The sisters testified their delight at the good looks of Jem, who had dressed himself in some of his best clothes, to pay a visit to his native village. He could talk of nothing else but London, and the fine sights he had seen—the kindness of his master, and the prettiness of the women.

“Od rot it,” said he, “I had almost forgot to gi’ mother what I got for her.” Then going to his box, he took out a large bundle full of different things, which the liberality of Deloraine had procured for dame Homely and her daughters. Dupree had also presents to bestow, and the hearts of the females throbbed with pride and pleasure as he displayed the finery he had bought for them.

“I have a present for you, Cicely,” said he, “from my noble master; but as it was to be a wedding-gift, your mother had perhaps better keep it for you.”

Then

Then looking archly in her blushing face, "It wont be wanted yet, Cicely, will it?"

"God bless your merry heart," cried the farmer. "Now what should the duke send our Cis a wedding-present for, seeing as how that she has got no lover yet?"

"That's all you knows, father," cried Jem, grinning with delight; "but I can tell you another sort of a story—can't you, sister?"

Dupree's heart beat quicker than usual.

"Who is he? who is he?" said the farmer and his wife. "If so be that he is an honest lad, why, dang it, let un not be afeard to speak his mind."

Jem clapped Dupree on the back—"Do ye hear that, man? Father and mother say ye need not be afeard to speak."

The joy of the old people was now unbounded. Dupree confessed his regard for Cicely, and received the full consent of her parents to make her his wife whenever

ever he liked. Poor Cicely would have hid her blushes in the bosom of her sister, but Dupree caught her in his arms, and kissing her affectionately, put into her hands a bank-note, the gift of his generous master.

As soon as they were a little tranquil, and had finished the second bottle of wine, Dupree mentioned his having been married, and the subsequent death of his wife; but he delicately concealed her duplicity from all but Cicely, whose honest heart could not forbear shedding a tear over the unhappy fate of a woman whose death had been a happy release both to herself and her betrayed husband.

Cicely and her lover were no sooner alone, than the latter smilingly inquired, if she had not suffered herself to think that he had forgot his promise? She replied in the affirmative, and was going to excuse herself, but he stopped her—"I forgive you," dear Cicely, said he. "When we dearly love, we are most apt
to

to fear; but you may believe me, my beloved girl, that I have never forgotten you. On my return to town, I was informed of my wife's increasing illness. It afforded me consolation to know that she had every advice and attendance that was necessary; but it pleased Heaven to release her out of a world which I confess has been a sad one to her.

“ Not considering myself bound to pay that outward respect to her memory as if we had lived together, I, without hesitation, confessed to the duke the terms on which we had always been, concealing from him only the cause of our separation; I then avowed my attachment for you, and requested that I might be permitted to assure you in person of my love and constancy.

‘ Dupree,’ said my noble master, ‘ I will not seek to discover the secrets between man and wife. I have a great regard for you, because I know you to be worthy of it. Go to your Cicely—give her

her this as a wedding-present from me. Marry her as soon as you can, and may she make you amends for the deprivations you have suffered in your first choice! Bring her with you to London, and we will dispose of her so as to make her comfortable."

Cicely and her sister were now very busy in getting ready their things, and making up their new gowns for the wedding; yet this did not prevent Susan from meeting Courteney sometimes in the lane, and from her he learnt all that he wished respecting Deloraine. His visits at the farm became less frequent, not that he met with a less warm reception than usual, but the malignity of his nature would not allow him to be a spectator of the happiness of its hospitable inmates. The sight of the good-humoured Dupree was hateful to him. Had it not been for his untimely arrival, he vainly imagined not merely that Cicely would have fallen a prey to his duplicity, but that

that both sisters would have become victims to his perfidy.

The banns had been twice published in the parish church, and on the third the nuptials were to be celebrated.

Lady Wilmington no sooner heard of this event, than she called at the farm to congratulate the young couple, and to offer to take Susan and place her under the care of her present waiting-maid, who should render her competent to take the situation against she herself got married, which there was some talk of. This was too eligible a proposal to be declined by the parents of Susan; besides, they should have the happiness of seeing their daughter every year when the family came down to the Castle. They accordingly consented with gratitude, not doubting but that Susan would meet with as good a match as her sister.

Courteney could hardly conceal his exultation when Susan told him that they were to live under the same roof together.

ther. He almost smothered her with his caresses, and in receiving hers, bestowed in the innocence of her nature, he almost forgot the disappointment he had met with in the failure of his plot on Cicely.

At length the third Sunday came, and Dupree proudly led his fair country girl to the village church, where, in the sight of her relations and friends, they exchanged vows of fidelity, which, fortunately for them, remained sacred and inviolable through life. All was perfect joy at the farm—every heart glowed with rapture and merriment, and the wine and cake went briskly round. Susan alone felt a wish ungratified, occasioned by the absence of Courteney. She retired to a little chamber which had been prepared for her on the ground floor, that which she had formerly occupied being now consigned to her sister and her husband.

Not inclined to sleep, she softly opened her shutter, to let in the rich perfume
of

of the woodbine which grew round her casement. Susan thought she perceived a tall figure moving forward between the trees of their garden. Fearless of danger, she continued to watch its motions. It became more discernible from the rising moon, which now shone with all its vestal purity. The figure rapidly advanced; she heard her own name softly pronounced, and the next moment felt the kiss of Courteney on her cheek.

Susan, attired as bride's-maid to Cice-ly, glowing with youth, innocence, and beauty, was an object calculated to call forth the worst affections of the heart. Courteney gazed on her with passionate admiration; he saw the blush of pleasure dye her cheeks as he told her that his inability to rest without seeing her all that day had induced him to wander at so late an hour, in the hope of being able to catch a look at features which he adored.

“ Oh, my sweet Susan,” said he, stepping lightly in at the window, “ what
now

now are the transports of the happy Dupree! what now the blissful raptures of a husband who holds to his bosom the wife he adores! Oh, Susan, were you but mine, what would prevent my tasting equal felicity? but, alas! that cannot take place until we are in London, then we may be married privately, and we *will*, dear Susan, the day after our arrival." Then pressing her warmly to his breast, he continued, "In the eyes of Heaven, Susan, you are my wife. Look up, sweet girl, and bless my ears with the sound of your voice. Call me your husband, your dear Leopold, for I am yours, and yours only."

Susan's heart throbbed as if it would break through her stays; she loved Courteney with all the fervor of a first attachment; she believed every word he uttered: thus love, opportunity, and the tongue of the hypocrite, conspired to betray the artless daughter of the farmer; and Courteney, ere the sun was seen to
gild

gild the eastern sky, had added another victim to the list of those whose honour he had betrayed.

His conquest rendered now complete, he remembered that he had risked his own good name and future fortune in life; he therefore renewed his oaths of marrying Susan as soon as they went to London, and dried the repentant tears, which had already begun to flow, by assurances of his inviolable attachment, and by setting forth to her view the happiness they should enjoy when under the same roof. Susan again believed; she wiped away her tears, and, as she returned his embrace, said—"If you play false, Mr. Courteney, you will kill me—I shall die with grief—with shame; but I will never betray you."

Dupree and Jem now prepared to leave the hospitable farm; and dame Homely began to feel all the sorrow of parting with her daughter.—"Cheer up, mother,"

ther," cried Jem ; " master will, for certain, be down for a week in August, and mayhap the duke may come with him. If so bees as how he should, why then Cis and her husband will, in all likelihood, come wi' 'em."

" It is most probable, my dear mother," said Dupree, " that his grace may accompany Mr. Deloraine, for they are more like brothers than any thing else. I know not which of them loved the countess best. Never sure was woman more adored—more deeply lamented."

" Ah," replied the farmer's wife, " and she deserved it all. My lord bees going to put up a beautiful monument over her grave ; but he had better have acted like a father to her while she was living. Well, thank God that made me as I am ; I envy not the great, and my Cis is more likely to be happy as she bees, than if she was born a lady."

Cicely clung affectionately to her husband—

band—"That I am, mother; I would not change my husband for any lord or duke in all the world."

Poor Susan hung her head in melancholy silence. She saw her smiling sister depart with her husband and brother, and she could not refrain from shedding tears of self-reproach; yet, remembering the solemn vows of her seducer, she wiped them away, and tried to comfort her father and mother for the loss of their Cicely."

"Come, dame, dry your eyes," cried the farmer; "ad rot it, don't let us be playing the fool. Our Cis is married to an honest lad, and a merry one; we shall see her again soon, I dare say. Come, wife, we have had our time, and let us thank God that both our girls are honest women, and that neither of them have been made a fool of. Here's Sue, she be going from us soon; I wish it was upon the same errand as her sister. I think, Sue,

ye had better have the young miller, and stay at home wi' mother and I."

Susan's heart was full; but the miller was now her aversion; and she said she should like to go and live with the marchioness.

"Well, well," replied her father, "ye shall go, my girl, and God send ye just such another as Dupray for a husband. Your mother and I and Bill must try to do without ye—I should be loath to offend my lady Wilmington."

The kind farmer and his wife endeavoured to comfort themselves, in the hope that their Susan would get as good a husband as Cicely. They were sorry, however, that neither the housekeeper nor Mrs. Mason accompanied the family to town; and they resolved to speak to Courteney about their child. Accordingly, when he next called at the farm, after many pardons and entreaties that he would not be offended at the liberty they were

were taking, they besought him to have the goodness sometimes to inquire how Susan was going on, and to continue to lend her some of those good books which he had brought for her and her sister.

Courteney, with a serious countenance, and an air of pious solemnity, assured them that he would watch over Susan as much as lay in his power, and caution her against all the artifices of the townsmen, whom he affirmed were ever on the look-out for the young and artless. The parents of Susan felt fresh comfort by this assurance from so worthy, so good a man; and Susan herself found her spirits revive, as the day approached which was destined for the removal of the family at the Castle.

Lady Wilmington wished to be in town before the birthday, as she had promised, before the fatal accident which deprived her of her beloved niece, to present a relation of the late marquis on that day. Lord Mortimer, who still looked forward

to

to the possibility of gaining the society of Deloraine, made no objection; and they accordingly prepared to set forward on a journey, which gave birth to a variety of feelings in the hearts of the different travellers.

END OF VOL. II.

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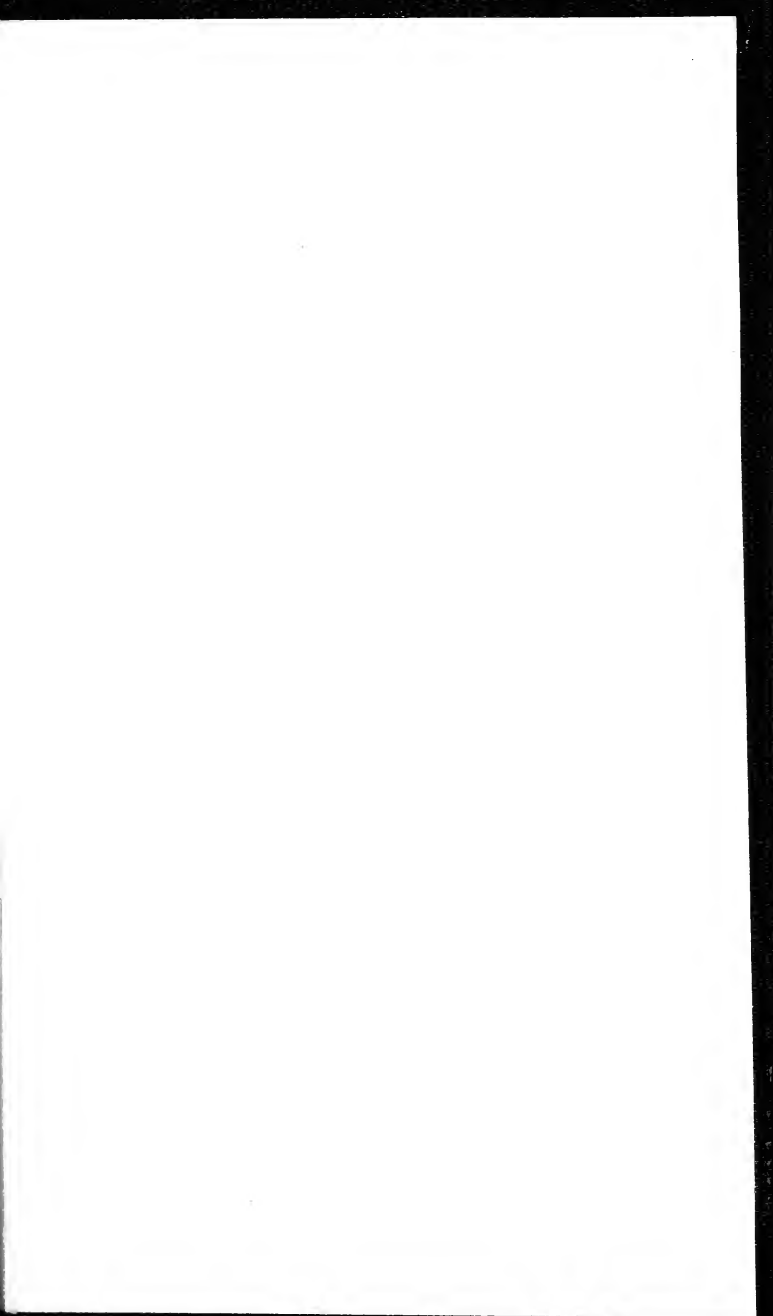
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